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**HOME SCHOOLING IN ALASKA:
EXTREME EXPERIMENTS IN HOME EDUCATION**

**A
THESIS**

**Presented to the Faculty
of the University of Alaska Fairbanks
in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements
for the Degree of**

MASTER OF ARTS

**By
Terje Ann Hanson, B.A.**

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Abstract

This study explores the history of home schooling in Alaska. The 49th state offers an unusual degree of freedom from regulation that allows diverse and innovative experiments in home education to flourish. Currently, Alaskan home schoolers enjoy more freedom to practice their craft than in any other state of the United States.

Alaska has never had enough money to deliver quality education to its children. Trying to establish an education system, to serve a small population scattered over more than half-a-million square miles, required the development of innovative methods: one of these was home schooling. Home schooling provides a low cost answer to educate Alaska's children, and became an accepted institution in Alaskan education. Today home schooling continues to deliver lower cost education to both the remote and urban student, in the North, but also offers myriad options for parents who demand more and greater flexibility in educating their children.

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Introduction

Home schooling is now a legal educational option in every state and territory of the United States, with Alaskan home educators having the most freedom to practice their craft than anywhere else in the United States. Legislation passed in 1997, effectively removed all regulations from Alaskan home schoolers, which resulted in the most home schooling options available in America.

Currently, 6.7 to 7 percent of students in Alaska are educated at home, for a total of 9000 to 9500¹ children, out of a total school age population of 133,047.² Nationwide, home schoolers make up only about 2 percent of the school-aged population.³ The discrepancy between the percentages in Alaska, compared with the rest of the United States, is due to the fact that Alaskans enjoy the least restrictive atmosphere for home schooling in the Union. According to Darren Jones, a prominent legal expert on home schooling with the Home School Legal Defense Association, "Alaskans do not have to meet any teacher qualifications, notify or register with state or local school districts, meet any subject specifications or compulsory attendance requirements, conduct standardize testing, or file records. All other state laws require home schoolers to meet at least one of these requirements, many require them all."⁴ Only Michigan and Texas laws come close to this freedom, however, those states still have subject matter requirements. In Alaska, no one has the legal right to tell home schoolers what they should or should not teach.

Because of this freedom, Alaskans can choose from several options available for home schooling. Some options have restrictions while others require no accountability whatsoever.

One option, parents can hire a private tutor⁵ to come into the home and teach the children. The tutor must be a certified teacher and teach courses that are comparable to

¹ Author tally, April 2000

² Alaska Department of Education, *School enrollment as of October 1, 1999*

³ Ray, Brian D., *Strengths of Their Own*, NHERI Publications, Salem, OR p2

⁴ Darren Jones. Home School Legal Defense Association, Interview 12 April 2000

⁵ Home School Legal Defense Association's web page (www.hslda.org) Across the States: Show Me the Laws.

subjects offered in a public school. Parents bear the costs for this option and their children must be in session 180 days a year.

An option requiring varying levels of accountability is a "state department of education approved full-time correspondence program."⁶ Alaska offers two choices in correspondence options. A family can enroll in the statewide, centralized correspondence school (Alyeska Central School), or choose one, out of several, local school district correspondence programs that are available throughout the state.

If a family enrolls in the statewide Alyeska Central School, then the students receive prepackaged curricula, along with parent manuals, and all the equipment and supplies required to complete the coursework. Each student is accountable to an advisory teacher in Juneau, Alaska, who gives advice, grades assignments and tests, and keeps records.

The district correspondence programs can vary drastically from district to district. Some district correspondence programs are similar to Alyeska Central School with prepackaged curricula and advisory teachers. Others have itinerant teachers that travel from home to home and relieve some of the teaching responsibilities from the parents. Districts work with their enrollees in regards to curricula. Some districts control how the funding is spent, by supplying prepackaged curricula of the district's choice. Other districts, such as Galena City School District's IDEA program, set a spending limit for the parents, relative to how many children they have enrolled in the program, and allow the parents to choose from a wide variety of curricula, private lessons, or even enrolling their children, part-time, in university or public school classes. The State of Alaska pays for the correspondence programs and, as with all state approved correspondence options, parents must conduct school 180 days a year.

A more restrictive option available to Alaskan home schoolers is to "request school board approval to provide an equal alternate educational experience."⁷ Under this option, parents must approach a local school board, or principal of a school, and gain approval to educate their children at home. Parents must prove to the officials that the curricula they

⁶ Ibid.

⁷ Ibid.

choose can provide an equal educational experience in subjects that are comparable to those offered in public schools. Once the curricula choices have been approved, parents must conduct school 180 days a year. Parents bear the costs of this option.

All of these options require some level of government oversight, however, the last option, and the least restrictive, is to "establish and operate a home school."⁸ Under this option parents simply choose to home school their children. They do not have to register with any school district or with the State of Alaska. They can use any curricula or style of teaching they want, and they are not accountable for any days of schooling a year. The responsibility of educating the children is completely on the parent. There is no government interference and the students are not held to any standards. Parents bear the costs of this option. This option offers innumerable choices for the home schooling family and has only one requirement: the parent or guardian must teach the children in the home. Students cannot receive an accredited diploma high school diploma through this option.

How these options translate in real life differ from family to family. My husband and I have been home schooling our children for eight years. None of our four children have ever gone to a public school, and I have always been their predominate teacher.

We first began thinking about home schooling during the winter of 1989. It was an especially cold winter, even for Fairbanks, Alaska, where the average winter temperature is well below zero. The temperatures plummeted down to 69 degrees below zero Fahrenheit, and stayed there for several weeks. I thought that the school busses continued to run for longer than was reasonable, and the public schools remained open longer than they should. Some friends of ours took their children to a private school everyday. As it got colder, their vehicle continually broke down. They had to walk for help a couple of times and the children were frostbitten. We do not live in town, and as we contemplated the long commute to *any* school for our children, we decided that it was too far, and school was not important enough to risk our children's lives. We decided to home school. Our oldest child, at the time was

⁸ Home School Legal Defense Association's web page (www.hslda.org) Across the States: Show Me the Laws.

two years old, which gave me time to prepare for this experience by doing research. I learned what home schooling was all about, how to find curriculum and what teaching styles would work for us.

When we began, we established our home school under a private exempt home school option and paid for all the school-related materials and activities ourselves. In 1997 we enrolled in IDEA, which is one of the district correspondence options. IDEA gave us a computer, for a deposit of \$200, supplied the curricula choices I preferred, and allowed us to conduct school as we always had, with me being the only teacher. The big difference was that now the district bought the curriculum, paid for the activities and later, began adding restrictions to our lives. After a few years, we realized that the funding we received was not worth the added burden of restrictions, and that by participating in the program, we were actually contributing to the climbing costs of education and tax burden for the State of Alaska. We therefore chose to withdraw from this correspondence school option, and proceeded to establish and operate our own home school. This option allows us to do as we please, with maximum flexibility; and we pay all costs ourselves.

Our home school has morphed drastically over the last eight years. At first we basically imported a public school classroom into our home. We kept this up for several years until we ran out of room because of our increasing family size. During this time I also realized that I was not a public schoolteacher, I was a home schoolteacher and I do not need to replicate the public school in my home.

Since then things have changed considerably. The house expanded allowing all the children to have desks, which hold some of their curricular materials, however, the desks seldom hold the student. The children do their academic work however they please. One child does most everything laying on the floor, another prefers the couch, still another, the oldest, waits until everyone else has gone to bed and then does her academic work in her room. We come together, with everyone sitting at their desks, at times when I actually teach. As the children get older, this happens less and less often because the children are more self-directed and self-motivated. I find that the better a child reads, the less work for the home teacher. As

the older children grow and mature, they help teach the younger ones. Home schooling is a family affair.

Most academic work occurs in the early morning hours, however, it can take place throughout the day, in the car as we are running errands, or getting extra help from mom in the afternoons, or in the University library while I spend time being a Teaching Assistant, or out at our mine during mining season. In a home school, the school day never ends. It is a lifestyle, and educational moments can occur anywhere at anytime.

Our children get most of their math out of a textbook, but it is the only actual textbook we use. All other subjects-history, geography, science, reading, creative writing, spelling, etc., are taught from Newberry and Caldecott Award books, historical fictions and biographies. Usborne and Eyewitness Science books are great for science and history. I am a historian, so I weave the curriculum in such a way that most subjects, at any one time, revolve around a particular time period in U.S. or World History. We subscribe to various magazines, and have a library of educational CD-Roms. I try to provide as much hands-on experience as possible. The children are very dramatic and love to act out scenes from books, choreograph dances, sing, and recite their Awana verses.

As far as academic standards go, I give my children standardized tests but I do not give grades. I am more concerned that they know how to find an answer than I am having them memorize facts. The children correct their mistakes until they understand it and get it right. Our goal for our children is that they know how to live in the real world before they have to go out there and live it on their own. We have the children fix their mistakes until they understand them, this teaches them diligence, and imparts some of the work ethic that is sadly lacking in America society today.

We pay close attention to the interests and dreams of our children. We conduct what is called "delight directed"⁹ studies. When a child shows particular

⁹ Harris, Greg. The Home schooling Workshop. Christian Life Workshops, Gresham, OR p49-56

interest in a subject or activity, we feed it. I have one child that is interested in whales, so at every possible opportunity I try to integrate whales into the subject being taught. It creates a higher interest level for this child because she learns, for example, math concepts by figuring out dimensions of the different species of whales. Another child helps clean houses with a woman who does this for a living. She spends part of one day a week cleaning and earning money. Another child is apprenticing with his father, in the summer, out at our mine learning skills that will be useful in real life. This child also has a fascination with learning everything he can about first aid and survival skills in the great outdoors. All of our children volunteer at our local community food bank, working with someone from the Foster Grandparent Program; bagging bagels and rolls; washing and sorting vegetables, fruit and eggs; rebagging sugar, rice and salt; and filling food boxes. Our children are learning to function in the real world.

We are but one example of how a home school operates. Each home presents a different scenario. On one side of the spectrum, home schools import a public school setting into their homes...following a rigid schedule everyday, conducting a classroom, and being completely accountable to a program and advisory teachers. On the other end of the spectrum a family may do nothing at all, be accountable to no one and just live life. As can be seen, there are varying levels of funding, accountability, individual responsibility and motivations in the home school world. Most home schoolers fall some where between the two extremes.

Alaskan home schooling is thriving due to the fact that it fits the unique Alaska lifestyle. Alaskan statistics demonstrate this truth as home schooling grew from 4 percent of the school age population in 1996-97, to the current 6.7 to 7 percent.¹⁰ Why this came about is the subject of this thesis.

¹⁰ Alaska Department of Education, *School Enrollment as of October 1, 1996, 1997, 1998, 1999*

Chapter One

The Early Period:

Home Schooling Begins Circa 1880's – 1930's

During the Gold Rush Era, scores of miners immigrated to Alaska. Some of these prospectors brought their families and boomtowns appeared at the sites of big strikes where gold rushes began. The Federal Bureau of Education, the agency responsible for educating Alaska's children at the time, was unable to keep up with the growth of communities, or the need for schools, because they did not have the money.¹ The miners, who arrived with their families, faced the dilemma of how to educate their children in isolation, in the absence of schools, with no money to establish schools.

Some parents sent their children back to the States to receive an education. Others made their way to somewhat stable settlements that had schools. However, there were those who were undaunted by Alaska's lack of schools and set out to educate their children on their own. The 1899 *The Douglas Island News* addressed this issue: "The education of their children is the great problem confronting thousands of parents in Alaska. You came here [Alaska] hoping to "strike it rich" in a year or two; but you are still here and your children are rapidly growing up amid inadequate or no educational facilities."² The editor scolded parents for neglecting the advantages available and exhorted them to begin educating their children at home:

A child's best education depends more on the home training than on the schools, and the home is as much a factor in Alaska as elsewhere...[While] the city affords much better school facilities than the country, but the country boy stands ten chances to one of

¹ Report of the Governor of Alaska to the Secretary of the Interior. Department of the Interior, Government Printing Office (Washington, D.C.) 1917 p22

rising to eminence...than they would have raised in the city of Boston.³

The editor pointed out that a good home education begins with parents who must "be qualified to instruct or direct their children. They may be illiterate but they must understand child life and character and inspire their children with their own enthusiasm."⁴ He encouraged parents to tantalize their young children with stories of; "history, brave and noble deeds, those beautiful biblical, mythological, and legendary stories with which every well informed person should be familiar."⁵ He believed this stimulates a young child's mind to explore more in the realm of history and literature. The editor goes on to outline a curriculum for any boy or girl; with the barest of resources.

You must never grow tired even when you read for the seventh time the story of Farragut's capture of New Orleans, or Chas Kingsley's "Capture of the Golden Fleece" back in legendary Greece. Don't despise "Alice in Wonderland" or that very old but beautiful story found among the ruins of ancient Egypt, "Cinderella." When the child has learned to read, keep him interested by supplying him with something fascinating, and read with him. Don't be too particular about what they read—lead them along the highways of good literature if possible; through stories of adventure, history, discovery, the natural sciences, biography and good fiction; but never let the interest lag.⁶

The editor believed that reading is so important that; "a boy had better read the worst blood-and-thunder stories ever written than read nothing, for he will be forming the reading habit and will probably soon grow disgusted with such trash and commence

² *The Douglas Island News* Wednesday, April 26, 1899 p2

³ *Ibid.*

⁴ *Ibid.*

⁵ *Ibid.*

⁶ *Ibid.*

reading something better."⁷ He thought a good home school library should contain a: "general newspaper, an illustrated weekly such as Harper's or Leslie's, a first-class religious or scientific paper, and six to twelve books. These should be masterpieces of history, science and general literature."⁸

In conclusion, the editor recognized that educational advantages would come eventually, however the parents must "not neglect the work you can do and must do at home if you would give your child a symmetrical and perfect education."⁹

Due to the lack of funds, and stable population bases, the educational advantages were very slow in coming. The Federal Bureau of Education educated the Native population, while the incorporated towns supported their own schools. The Territory of Alaska assumed the responsibility of educating the white children, outside of incorporated towns, under the Nelson School Law of 1905. The Nelson Act provided funding,¹⁰ for communities that had "a school population of twenty white children and children of mixed blood who lead a civilized life," so they could establish a school district and select a school board.¹¹ The Nelson Act provided this funding by creating what was called "the Alaska Fund," comprised of money collected from license fees outside incorporated towns. The Act allotted 25 percent of the Alaska Fund to be used for education.¹²

However, the funding provided by the Nelson Act was not enough for the Territory to support the rural schools that were outside incorporated towns. That left many families with no school option. Parents who kept their children with them had to make a choice: do nothing or educate their children themselves. Some parents were either incapable or unwilling to shoulder their children's education at home. Rather, they wanted public schools for educating their children. However, meeting Alaska's educational needs was no small chore.

⁷ Ibid.

⁸ Ibid.

⁹ Ibid.

¹⁰ Gruening, Ernest, The State of Alaska. (Random House, Inc., New York, NY) 1968 pp123-24

¹¹ Report of the Governor of Alaska to the Secretary of the Interior. Department of the Interior, Government Printing Office (Washington, D.C.) 1917 p23

¹² Naske, Claus, and Slotnick, Herman, Alaska A History of the 49th State. (University of Oklahoma Press) 1987 p89

In an attempt to meet some of Alaska's rural educational needs, the 1917 Territorial legislature formed an ex-officio Territorial Board of Education comprised of Governor J.F.A. Strong, and four senators.¹³

The Territorial Board of Education appointed Lester D. Henderson as the Commissioner of Education.¹⁴ At that time, the Department of Education was only a name, there was no office or staffing. The enormity of his position is hard to grasp. It was virtually impossible for Commissioner Henderson, with little funding and office help, to administer and visit an area comprising approximately six hundred thousand square miles.¹⁵

When Commissioner Henderson took charge of the Department of Education, he assumed authority over the fifty-five Territorial schools for white children and those of mixed blood. These schools were, "maintained in 40 [rural] communities outside incorporated towns and in 15 incorporated towns. These schools were scattered all the way from Kiana and Eagle in the north [about 836 miles apart] to Unga and Ketchikan on the southern coast [about 1680 miles apart]."¹⁶ Where rural schools did exist, the Territory had to anticipate their needs months in advance, sending supplies and equipment in one big shipment to last the whole year.¹⁷ For example, in 1920, Commissioner Henderson explained the problems servicing a territory so large and unpredictable:

In the average state, it is possible to communicate with all the schools and receive replies in from a few days to a week's time. In Alaska, replies to communications sent out in September cannot be received from some dozen schools until late in December and not until considerably later from two or three others. Communications sent out later than March first cannot well reach these schools before the close of the school year, due to the fact that there is a

¹³ Report of the Commissioner of Education for the Years Ending June 30, 1918, June 30, 1919, and June 30, 1920. Alaska Territorial Department of Education, Juneau Daily Capital (Juneau, Alaska) 1918 p3

¹⁴ *Ibid.*

¹⁵ *Ibid.* p38

¹⁶ *Ibid.*

¹⁷ *Ibid.*

period of from six weeks to two months in which no mail is moving, when the transition from dog team mail service to water transportation is being made.¹⁸

To make matters even more difficult, the Territory was also suffering from a business depression and a decline in population. Communities went through boom-to-bust cycles. When the natural resources ran out, people left the community. Oftentimes the community became too small to leave enough children to keep a school operating. Between 1917 and 1920, several¹⁹ [Territorial] schools closed, others either; reduced their teaching force, suspended certain activities or shortened their school year.²⁰ Alaska's white population did not have enough educational facilities to serve their children satisfactorily and they did not want to place their children in the Federal Bureau of Education schools because they were notorious for offering a poor education.

In an attempt to find an alternate solution, the Territory of Alaska decided to try something new. They experimented with a correspondence option for the people of Alaska.

¹⁸ Ibid.

¹⁹ Ibid. p39

²⁰ Ibid.

Chapter Two

Alaska Responds:

Establishes a Correspondence Program 1933-1960's

In 1933, the Eleventh Alaska Legislature attempted to streamline the cost of education by initiating several changes within the Territory's educational system. They removed the public school system from the politician's hands, and created a Board of Education, "empowered with ample authority to give the Territory an efficient school organization."¹ On May 4, 1933, the *Daily Alaska Empire* reported that the legislature passed a school re-organization measure that created a new, non-partisan, Board of Education that had, "sweeping authority to administer and control, through the Commissioner of Education, rural schools and in less degree, the schools in incorporated towns and incorporated school districts."²

One of the first problems recognized in the Territorial system, was the lack of high school education. To address this issue, a bill was introduced in the House of Representatives in an attempt to create a "Division of High School Correspondence," under the Commissioner of Education, to enable eighth grade graduates, living outside of incorporated districts to continue their education. The State of Massachusetts' had a program for correspondence education for students in outlying areas that had proven successful for several years.³ The legislature reviewed Massachusetts' program and decided that a similar program would work in Alaska. The 1933 legislature decided to appropriate \$8,000 for correspondence education.⁴

¹ "A Notable Session," *The Daily Alaska Empire*, (Juneau) 6 May 1933, p4

² "Lawmakers End Labors at Late Hour Yesterday," *The Daily Alaska Empire*, (Juneau) 6 May 1933, p1

³ "High School Correspondence," *Alaska School Bulletin*, March 1933 p1

⁴ Minutes of the Territorial Board of Education, Second Regular Session, Wednesday, Feb. 13, 1935 p3

Governor John W. Troy appointed the Alaskan Territorial Board of Education.⁵ As the new Board took the helm, it quickly became apparent that because of the vast distances and number of isolated communities in Alaska, the Territory lacked enough funds to effectively educate Alaska's white children and children of mixed blood. Therefore, the Territorial Board of Education took control of the school funds, designated by Nelson Act of 1905, that were previously delegated by the governor and four senators, and turned them over to the Commissioner of Education of the Territory of Alaska, to disburse as he, or another designated officer saw fit.⁶

To streamline spending, the Territorial Board of Education cut funding for transporting students, who lived in outlying districts and rural areas that were attending schools in incorporated towns and school districts.⁷ A student had to live within two-miles of the school in order to get transportation. By this, the Board was attempting to encourage residents in rural areas and unincorporated districts to incorporate into school districts so they could levy taxes. Then the school district could pay the costs of transporting its own students to school. School boards were given permission to contract for the retrieval students who were outside of a two-mile limit from school.⁸

Next, the Board abolished all rural school boards and took direct administration of these places through the office of the Commissioner of Education.⁹ In the past, the local school boards misused their appropriations and many overdrew their accounts. This made it impossible for the Commissioner of Education to balance his budget.¹⁰

Lastly, the Board abolished all rural high schools. The Board compared the cost of educating the small number of high school students outside incorporated towns, cities and school districts to the cost of those within boundaries. They decided that after the end of the 1933-34 school year, Territorial funds would no longer "be used or expended for the establishment or maintenance of high schools except in incorporated towns or in

⁵ "Correspondence Education," *Alaska School Bulletin*, Sept. 1938, Vol. XXI, No. 1, p8

⁶ Minutes of the Territorial Board of Education, Fourth Session, June 15th, 1933 (Office of Commissioner, Territory of Alaska) pp2-3

⁷ *Ibid.*

⁸ Rules and Regulations of the Board of Education of the Territory of Alaska, Article VII, 1933 p9

⁹ Rules and Regulations of the Board of Education of the Territory of Alaska, Article III, 1933 p4

¹⁰ Report of the Commissioner of Education School Biennium ended June 30, 1934, (Department of Education, Territory of Alaska) p39

incorporated school districts."¹¹ Incorporated towns and school districts could levy taxes, thereby helping the Territory fund the high schools within their boundaries.

To make up for the lack of rural high schools, Commissioner of Education Anthony E. Karnes presented a plan to the Alaska Board of Education's opening session, to begin high offering school work by correspondence.¹² He referred to the fact that \$8,000 had been appropriated by the legislature, for buying high school correspondence courses, earlier that spring. The money was still sitting there, not being used.

Because the Board cut transportation funding, there was no transportation available for children to attend school if their family lived outside of an incorporated town or school district. If there was no transportation for the children, then they often did not attend school. Those who lived close enough to walk, ski, dog sled, travel the waterways, or use other means of transportation to get to school, had to brave the wilds of Alaska to get there. Parents expressed concern for their children's safety citing "weather condition[s], wolves and other wild beast[s]."¹³ The Board asked the Legislature if they would amend the Territorial laws so as to extend school district boundaries. This would allow transportation to reach out further to residents in outlying areas, who could be taxed to help cover the cost of transporting their students.¹⁴

However, transportation could never reach out far enough, into Alaska's remoteness, to gather all rural students and bring them to a school. This was an impossible task. The need for a correspondence education option was obvious. However, none of the \$8,000 appropriated, in 1933, for high school correspondence was ever used,¹⁵ because the Board was reluctant to experiment with correspondence education. They refused to act on any recommendations and chose to wait for further studies that officially affirmed the need for correspondence.¹⁶ H.L. Faulkner, President of the Board of Education said that the Board was new and, because of that, it necessarily must proceed slowly. "We are

¹¹ Minutes of the Territorial Board of Education, Fourth Session, June 15th, 1933 (Office of Commissioner, Territory of Alaska) p3

¹² "Alaska Board of Education Opens Session." *The Daily Alaska Empire*, (Juneau) 13 June 1933, pp1 & 3

¹³ Minutes of the Territorial Board of Education, Second Regular session, February 15, 1935 p1

¹⁴ Minutes of the Territorial Board of Education, Thursday, May 10, 1934 p1

¹⁵ Minutes of the Territorial Board of Education, Second Regular Session, Wednesday, Feb.13, 1935 p3

¹⁶ "Correspondence Education," *Alaska School Bulletin*, Sept., 1938 Vol. XXI, No.1, p8

feeling our way as we go along," he said. "There are a good many problems affecting the Territorial school system that have to be studied and it will take time to find out just where we are at."¹⁷

By 1936, The Territorial Board of Education saw the need for correspondence education in Alaska, and recommended that the Legislature appropriate \$4,000 and put it "under the direction of the Territorial Board of Education and the Commissioner of Education in supplying textbooks and helping to pay for correspondence courses."¹⁸ They recognized that "Provision should be made for the education of children in isolated places."¹⁹ The legislature did not adopt this recommendation.

In May of 1938, the Board stated the need for "some form of educational facilities for children living in isolated places where there are not enough children for a school."²⁰ A Dr. H.A. Blythe, of Fairbanks, spoke to the Board about the children living on "fox farms and other out-of-town places, children whose parents are helping to develop the country" who needed education. He requested "that the Board ask the next Legislature for an appropriation for correspondence courses for children in isolated places."²¹ The editors of the *Alaska School Bulletin* affirmed this need of Alaska's rural children by running an advertisement directing teachers and parents to a list of reputable schools that provide home study courses.²² These schools included Calvert School of Baltimore, who supplied elementary curricula, and the University of Nebraska, who supplied high school courses for rural students.

Douglas Colp is an example of a one of those children living on fox farms. Douglas's parents ordered curriculum from Calvert School of Baltimore, Maryland. Calvert School began serving home instruction to parents, in 1906, by supplying pre-packaged curricula; everything required for educating a child for an entire year of school. The idea caught on and Calvert soon spread to rural areas, across the United States, becoming the predominant school in the nation that offered correspondence courses to the elementary

¹⁷ "Second Dimond Bill for Home Rule Approved." *The Daily Alaska Empire*, (Juneau) 14 June 1933, p8

¹⁸ Report of the Commissioner of Education School Biennium ended June 30, 1936, (Department of Education, Territory of Alaska) p39

¹⁹ *Ibid.* p40

²⁰ Minutes of the Territorial Board of Education, First Special Session, May 15, 1938 pp2-3

²¹ *Ibid.* May 17, 1938 p1

grades. Douglas Colp, remembers using Calvert courses for first through sixth grade. Mr. Colp was born in Petersburg, Alaska, in 1914. In 1916, his father started a fox ranch about five miles out of Petersburg, where they lived a subsistence lifestyle. His mother taught the Calvert curriculum for Douglas and his younger brother, from 1921 through 1927.

Mother was the principal one [teacher]. She saw to it that we had to sit down at the table for our scheduled time at 8:30 or so to 10:00, for about two hours in the morning and two hours in the afternoon. I remember that I followed the outline of courses, reading, writing, arithmetic, spelling, history and geography. We had a little period of time that every so often I had to take tests that were sent in. I don't remember any of the grades...but evidently, they kept me going from one grade to the other until at the end of home schooling, at the end of sixth grade, we came to town.²³

The Colp family hired a tutor for Douglas's fifth and sixth grade. His mother was so busy with the washing, cooking, gardening, canning and helping run the fox ranch that she needed help with the boys. "She kind of took over for mother. We had one room that we dedicated to schooling. It had a homemade table. We sat at that table and did what we were supposed to do."²⁴ The family moved into Petersburg in 1927, because the bottom fell out of the fox fur market. The children discontinued using the Calvert curriculum and entered the public school.

Purchasing curriculum or hiring tutors was a large expense for the average family. In 1938, Commissioner of Education, Anthony E. Karnes, spoke of the needs of children where "there are not enough pupils to form even a special school, who are not receiving any educational advantages. In some instances the parents have asked for books and are trying to give their children what they can during their spare moments." A special school was one that had at least six students between the ages of six and sixteen, and in grades

²² "Approved Home Study Schools," *Alaska School Bulletin*, Feb., 1938 Vol.20, No. 6 p4

²³ Douglas Colp, interview, 15 January 2000

²⁴ *Ibid.*

one through eight. The families being served by the special school helped pay for the maintenance of the building by furnishing light, fuel and janitor service. Commissioner Karnes stated that there were about 30 students receiving their schooling through Calvert Correspondence School who paid for it themselves, however, the parents could ill afford this expense.²⁵ The Board recommended that the 1939 Legislature appropriate \$8,000 to help these families, so they did not have to bear the cost of correspondence education for their children.²⁶

Later that August 1938, Commissioner Karnes attended the First International Conference on Correspondence Education in Victoria, British Columbia, Canada. Delegates from Canada, Australia, New Zealand and from many states in the U.S. attended. New Zealand, Australia and Canada had large populations living in outlying areas that reported success with their correspondence programs. He discovered that Massachusetts was the only state that had faculty within its state department of education to handle a correspondence program. Many smaller high schools in the U.S. purchased correspondence courses from the University of Nebraska to enrich their curriculum and offer a wider variety of subjects from which to choose. The editor of the *Alaska School Bulletin* stated that this type of education "has been a success in other places and there are certainly hundreds of pupils in Alaska who could receive their elementary and high school training if such courses were provided. We look forward to a time when there will be no illiteracy in Alaska and when pupils may receive high school and vocational training even though there may be no school nearby."²⁷

The 1939 Legislature did not appropriate the requested \$8,000 for correspondence education. However, it did authorize Commissioner Karnes to purchase correspondence courses and pay for them from the Schools Outside Incorporated Cities' fund,²⁸ if it would help eliminate rural school expenses.²⁹

²⁵ Report of the Commissioner of Education Biennium ended June 30, 1938, (Department of Education, Territory of Alaska) 1938 p20

²⁶ Ibid. p45

²⁷ "Correspondence Education," *Alaska School Bulletin*, Vol. XXI, No. 1 p9

²⁸ "Correspondence Courses Available," *Alaska School Bulletin*, Vol. XXII, No. 2, p3

²⁹ Report of the Commissioner of Education Biennium ended June 30, 1940, (Department of Education, State of Alaska) 1940 p62

Because the Legislature appropriated no funds specifically for correspondence education, the Territory required a deposit on each course. Each elementary course cost the Territory \$65. Parents were required to pay a deposit of \$20, refundable upon completion of the course work. The deposit ensured that only serious students apply. The Department of Education did not want a flood of applications for correspondence courses, spend lots of money for the service and then have students not finish the work.³⁰ In 1939, the Territory ordered eleven courses from Calvert Correspondence School of Baltimore, Maryland, complete with correcting services.³¹

An update on correspondence courses appeared in the March-April 1940, volume of the *Alaska School Bulletin*. At the time of issue, only twelve children were using the correspondence option. The writers of the *Bulletin* appeared apologetic by stating that though the numbers seemed small, compared to the number of students living in isolated places, it was not indicative of failure with correspondence education. The small numbers were attributed to the fact that they required the \$20 deposit, which was deemed necessary to ensure accountability. They also offered to order kindergarten courses for \$12.³²

Some rural or special schools opened their doors to the correspondence high school students. This way, the high school students could work on their courses with the supervision of a teacher. Correspondence courses are designed to be self-directed, however, the teacher was available to answer the occasional question. This allowed the high school students to choose from a wider variety of subjects, thus broadening their education, while requiring less of the teacher's time.

As time went on, the Board learned that it cost less to educate elementary correspondence students than it did regular, rural, elementary students. Through Calvert School, the cost to the Territory, for grades one through eight, was \$520 per student. Those same eight grades, in a rural school, cost on the average of \$1453.44.³³ To cut expenses, the Board decided to eliminate extra teachers in the smaller rural elementary

³⁰ "Correspondence Courses Available," *Alaska School Bulletin*, Vol. XXII, No. 2, p4

³¹ Report of the Commissioner of Education Biennium ended June 30, 1962, (Department of Education, State of Alaska) 1962 p24

³² "Correspondence Courses," *Alaska School Bulletin*, Vol. XXII, No. 7 March-April, 1940 p11

³³ Report of the Commissioner of Education Biennium ended June 30, 1940, (Department of Education, Territory of Alaska) 1940 p31

schools. This affected the high school students who were doing their coursework under these teachers.

The scarcity of high schools affected the economic situation in the state as well. By the end of the 1939-1940 school year, because of the lack of schools, only 22 students received *any* high school courses in *any* rural or special schools. [Most of these students were receiving high schools courses through a special arrangement with the elementary schools]. That left a large number of eighth grade graduates with nowhere to go but the job market. According to the 1940 *Commissioner's Report*, "when they do not continue on to high school, they immediately try to secure employment, and when they do, it means some adult is thereby thrown out of employment in many instances. Some provisions should be made whereby all 8th grade graduates could continue on in school until they are at least 18 years of age."³⁴

By 1941, Commissioner of Education, James C. Ryan, stated that, "many requests for high school correspondence courses were coming in from parents of pupils living in remote areas where no Territorial Schools were maintained."³⁵ The Territorial Board of Education unanimously decided that these remote students be provided with high school courses. They recommended that "the same plan for deposits and refunds as is now required for elementary correspondence courses be applied to high school courses."³⁶ Shortly after that meeting, an article appeared in the *Alaska School Bulletin* reminding teachers and students about the correspondence option that was available. It stated that only one high school student was taking part in the service. The writers of the *Bulletin* believed this was due to a lack of information about the program among the isolated population.³⁷

After the end of the 1941-42 school year, Commissioner Ryan stated that the Department ordered 81 correspondence courses. Commissioner Ryan did not categorize the courses between elementary and high school. However, he was encouraged enough to state that correspondence education was now a "regular feature...and that...In Alaska this

³⁴ *Ibid.* p33

³⁵ Minutes of the Territorial Board of Education, Sixth Regular Session, Fifteenth meeting, March 4, 1941, p1

³⁶ *Ibid.*

type of instruction has proven successful beyond our most optimistic hopes."³⁸ Unfortunately, Commissioner Ryan did not elaborate on why he considered correspondence education a success.

Neil Davis, later to become head of the Geophysical Institute, University of Alaska Fairbanks, gave a glimpse of his life while home schooling through the Calvert School Correspondence courses during 1944-45. In his book *Battling Against Success*, he remembers using the Calvert 7th grade course:

I really like the Calvert way of doing things. The course is arranged into five separate topics, and each topic is organized into a six-week unit. If I work an hour a day on each of the topics, I am expected to complete a unit for each topic every six weeks. We then mail the unit to Baltimore for grading by a teacher there, and when she finishes she mails the materials back. In the meantime, I am supposed to continue with the next set of units. Acting as a supervisor, Mom gets a separate set of papers which contain timed tests that I do for each unit.³⁹

Mr. Davis' mother modified the system by allowing him to concentrate on one topic at a time, instead of doing all five subjects every day. He liked this because he could focus in one direction and complete a six-week unit in one to three days. His teachers, in Baltimore, who graded the units and tests, marked on each individual unit, gave advice, reproofs and encouragement. His mother made him correct the mistakes the teachers marked. Occasionally he had to return his corrected papers to Baltimore to get the Calvert teacher's satisfaction.⁴⁰

Another family remembers using the Calvert program several years after Neil Davis. In 1956, Randy Briggs, former West Anchorage High school math teacher, moved

³⁷ Alaska School Bulletin, Vol. XXIII, No. 7, March-April 1941, p14

³⁸ Report of the Commissioner of Education Biennium ended June 30, 1942, (Department of Education, Territory of Alaska) 1942 p32

³⁹ Davis, Neil, *Battling Against Success*, (McRoy & Blackburn Publishers, Ester, Alaska) 1997 p94

⁴⁰ *Ibid.* pp94-95

with her husband and five children near Port Alsworth, on Lake Clark, in Southwestern Alaska, and immediately began using the Calvert program. Randy loved the Calvert courses and also used them to teach the children of the Alsworth family in Port Alsworth, Alaska. She taught the Alsworth children in exchange for goat's milk, vegetables from the garden and free rides to town. Randy stated that; "We home schooled because we wanted to live in the Bush."⁴¹ The family moved to Ugashik Village, in 1962, where they fished commercially and developed a family-operated, salmon cannery named Briggsway Company. (Currently Ugashik Wild Salmon Company). The family conducted school from 9am to noon everyday. She was quick to point out that they "never let school interfere with work."⁴² Mrs. Briggs remembers that Commissioner Don Dafoe was very easy to work with; "he let the kids advance [grade levels] whether or not they finished the program." He figured that she knew what she was doing since she had been a teacher.⁴³

Over the next two decades, participation in correspondence education grew. There was one problem during the 1947-1948 school year when the Territory stopped purchasing courses due to a lack of funds. The Department offered to order correspondence courses for students who were willing to bear the entire costs with the idea that the Territory would re-assume the costs as soon as possible.⁴⁴ The Department resumed purchasing correspondence service during the 1949-1950 school year.⁴⁵

Two decisions made in 1955 set the course of correspondence education in a new direction. The Board of Education considered undertaking "an 8 year program in which one year's elementary correspondence course be prepared each year so that after 8 years all elementary courses will be prepared and corrected by the [Alaska] Department of Education and that certain of this material be made available for the education of the handicapped and crowded remote schools."⁴⁶ The Board began thinking about bringing

⁴¹ Randy Briggs, interview. 4 November 1997

⁴² Ibid.

⁴³ Ibid.

⁴⁴ Report of the Commissioner of Education Biennium Ended June 30, 1948, (Department of Education, Territory of Alaska) 1948 p28

⁴⁵ Report of the Commissioner of Education Biennium Ended June 30, 1950, (Department of Education, Territory of Alaska) 1950 p32

⁴⁶ Minutes of the Territorial Board of Education, Fourteenth Regular Session, Seventh meeting, Feb. 16, 1955 p42

supervision of the correspondence program home to Alaska and writing their own curriculum. However, these events did not occur until several years later.

The Board also passed a motion officially allowing the use of supervised high school correspondence courses at established elementary schools where no high schools existed. This was the Pilot High School Program. They stipulated that each school must have be at least six, but not more than fifteen eligible participants for this pilot program. The Board suggested that the teacher's spouse "or some other suitable person might be paid on a per pupil per year basis." They also considered using upper grade teachers or the head teacher to perform the extra services.⁴⁷

During the 1955-56 school year, three pilot high schools operated out of the elementary schools located in Hope, Ninilchik, and Glenallen. These pilot high schools provided continuing education for eighth grade graduates. The students went to school everyday, and the local teacher supervised their correspondence work by taking attendance, answering occasional questions, checking over the lesson to ensure that it was complete, and then mailing the finished lesson. Personnel at the University of Nebraska, who supplied the high school courses, evaluated and recorded the lessons.⁴⁸ Correspondence participation increased from 108 high school students in 1954,⁴⁹ to 271 high school students in 1958,⁵⁰ reflecting the pilot high school project.

In the 1956 *Commissioner's Report*, Commissioner of Education, Don M. Dafoe, explained that the Territory provided correspondence courses for children who reside in the isolated areas where regular Territorial schools do not exist. Territorial schools were only found in incorporated cities and schools districts. Commissioner Dafoe explain how the work was handled for the correspondence students who lived in the unincorporated areas:

⁴⁷ Ibid. 9th meeting, p46

⁴⁸ A Program of Education for Alaskan Natives: A Research Report, Ray, Charles K. (University of Alaska) 1959 p122

⁴⁹ Report of the Commissioner of Education Biennium Ended June 30, 1954, (Department of Education, Territory of Alaska) 1954 p34

⁵⁰ Report of the Commissioner of Education Biennium Ended June 30, 1958, (Department of

The Correspondence Study and Testing Supervisor [Merrill Hatcher] maintains all necessary records, handles correspondence, orders courses, checks on progress, and beginning with the current year is making some visitations to specific areas where correspondence pupils are located to assist parents in supervising the courses, and to adequately determine their effectiveness.⁵¹

Commissioner Dafoe also explained who the students were that were receiving correspondence service. The Department served correspondence courses to both elementary and high school students who did not have a school in their area. They also served students in the "small High Schools Outside [Incorporated Districts] who have special needs that cannot be met locally."⁵² Some of these needs included curricular choices required for graduation. Lastly, correspondence education went out to physically handicapped children who lived in either the incorporated or incorporated districts.⁵³

Commissioner Dafoe attributed the growth of this program to the corresponding growth of the economy and the settlement of new areas in the Territory of Alaska due to Cold War Politics⁵⁴ as new roads were built into areas previously inaccessible.⁵⁵ Alaska's newfound military role, as a guardian of the north, translated into a network of radar defenses, military bases, the building of the distant early warning (DEW) system, and the establishment of the Naval Arctic Research Laboratory (NARL) in the far north.⁵⁶ The increase in Alaska's population resulted, in 1958, a 50% increase of participation in the program over the previous biennium.⁵⁷

Commissioner Dafoe's *Biennium Report* from 1958 reported that Board officials visited correspondence students in order to help the parents, and oversee the courses to

Education, Territory of Alaska) 1958 p34

⁵¹ Report of the Commissioner of Education Biennium Ended June 30, 1956, (Department of Education, Territory of Alaska) 1956 p18

⁵² *Ibid.* p37

⁵³ *Ibid.*

⁵⁴ *Ibid.* p72

⁵⁵ Naske, Claus, and Slotnick, Herman, Alaska A History of the 49th State. (University of Oklahoma Press) 1987 p136

⁵⁶ *Ibid.*

⁵⁷ *Ibid.* p34

determine their effectiveness.⁵⁸ The Department did not believe that correspondence study should take the place of actual public school attendance, but rather provided a "minimum type of instruction for pupils living in isolated areas until such time as the numbers are sufficient to justify a regular school."⁵⁹

Because of the expansion of the correspondence program, Merrill Hatcher recommended to the 1957 Board of Education that closer contact between the students and the office was required. Hatcher believed that a closer contact would reduce the amount of students dropping out of Correspondence Study.⁶⁰ The 1956-58 biennium statistics revealed that out of 980 courses purchased for 271 high school students, 136 courses were dropped,⁶¹ revealing a 14 percent dropout rate.

By 1959, increased participation in high school correspondence resulted in an increased dropout rate of 38.5 percent, so the Department altered their ordering policy. A normal year of high school consisted of eight courses. The new rule stated, "high school students new to correspondence study are limited to 2 courses until they demonstrate their ability to handle this type of work. It has been our experience that when four courses [one semester] are sent at one time, to beginning high school correspondence students, they are very apt to become discouraged and thus drop all the courses before completion."⁶² Even with this change in policy, correspondence participation continued to grow. Therefore, the Department of Education broadened the scope of correspondence education and offered students new reasons to use the courses.

Some students used correspondence courses to repeat subjects they had previously failed.⁶³ Others were able to complete courses that they had started in a larger school, but would not have been able to finish because their family moved to a smaller school where those same courses were not available. Students also took these courses to meet graduation

⁵⁸ Report of the Commissioner of Education Biennium Ended June 30, 1958, (Department of Education, Territory of Alaska) p17

⁵⁹ Ibid. p65

⁶⁰ Minutes of the Territorial Board of Education, Sixteenth Regular Session, Seventh Meeting, Thursday, February 7, 1957 p42

⁶¹ Report of the Commissioner of Education Biennium Ended June 30, 1958, (Department of Education, Territory of Alaska) p34

⁶² Report of the Commissioner of Education Biennium Ended June 30, 1960, (Department of Education, Territory of Alaska) 1960 p14-15

requirements.⁶⁴ Increasingly, students in towns and cities, that had Territorial high schools, chose the correspondence option to gain a wider selection of courses, or to meet graduation requirements. For example: Mrs. Myra F. Rank, Board of Education member from Fairbanks, said there was "extensive use" of correspondence courses in the Fairbanks schools.⁶⁵

In 1959, Alaska became a state. The Alaska State Board of Education quickly instituted some changes within the correspondence program. One change concerned itinerant teachers. In 1960, the Commissioner of Education, Dr. Theo J. Norby, reported to the Board that a Foundation expressed interest in connecting instructors with students who were utilizing correspondence courses. He thought that the Department could possibly "supplement these courses with an instructor who would go into an area for a week or two and then move on to another location."⁶⁶

The biggest change concerned the Department use of Calvert elementary courses. At a 1960 Board of Education meeting, Jack Finch, Director of Vocational Education, discussed Calvert courses after visiting Calvert Correspondence School, in Baltimore. He went there expressly to discuss the current relationship between Alaska and the Calvert School. The state of Alaska ordered elementary courses from Calvert. The students receiving the courses sent their coursework to Calvert for grading. Sometimes Alaska bought more courses than Calvert School received back for grading. Mr. Finch pointed out to the Board that Calvert did not allow any reuse of these courses even if the courses were ordered but never used. According to Calvert's policy, those courses could not be offered to another student. This policy wasted state education money. He negotiated with Calvert School a "concession on the re-use of courses," where Calvert agreed to reduce the price from \$125 down to \$45 per course. Meanwhile, a representative of Calvert School, Dr. Hart, suggested that Alaska assume the administration and advisory teaching services of the Calvert elementary correspondence courses. He offered to come to Alaska and help establish supervisory and correction services of the Calvert correspondence courses on a

⁶³ Minutes of the State Board of Education, Eighteenth Regular Session, March 16-18, 1959 p8

⁶⁴ Report of the Commissioner of Education Biennium Ended June 30, 1962, (Department of Education, State of Alaska) 1962 p24

⁶⁵ Minutes of the State Board of Education, Eighteenth Regular Session, March 16-18, 1959 pp8-9

local level. This way, he felt, Alaskans would save money and provide a more efficient service for its students.⁶⁷ The Board passed a motion to hire part time personnel to implement the supervision of the Calvert program at the state level.⁶⁸

⁶⁶ Ibid.pp4-5

⁶⁷ Minutes of the State Board of Education, Fourth Regular Session, May 12-14, 1960 p4

⁶⁸ Ibid.p5

Alaska Brings the Supervision of Correspondence Education Home 1960-1962

According to Commissioner Norby's 1960 Report, the Department terminated Calvert's Baltimore, Maryland, advisory teaching and correcting service July 1, 1960. Alaska's Department of Education began its own advisory teaching service of Calvert courses for the elementary grades. The Department hired "fully qualified teachers, who have been certified by the State of Alaska."⁶⁹

This group of certified teachers met with Department of Education members and Dr. Hart, from Calvert School. The teachers received special training for the job. The goal of this team was to build a closer relationship between the home teacher, the student and the Department of Education. Correcting schoolwork locally made it possible to respond quickly to student's needs.⁷⁰

The Board gave three reasons for basing the advisory teaching services, for Calvert courses, in Alaska, instead of Maryland. First, was that Alaskan "teachers have a better understanding of the students in remote areas of Alaska."⁷¹ This way, the teachers would always know the progress of each student, and respond to each one's academic needs faster. Secondly, Calvert charged \$40 per course for advisory teaching services, whether that child completed the course, or discontinued after moving into an area where regular school was available. Instead of paying Calvert advisory teachers the set rate of \$40 per course, Alaskan advisory teachers were paid per lesson. In the long run, this resulted in substantial savings for the State of Alaska.⁷²

Patricia Berryhill was a certified teacher in the Juneau School District who was hired as one of the original advisory teachers. According to Mrs. Berryhill, the children completed monthly lessons that consisted of thirty assignments. They took a test at the

⁶⁹ Report of the Commissioner of Education Biennium Ended June 30, 1960, (Department of Education, State of Alaska) p24

⁷⁰ Ibid.

⁷¹ Ibid.

⁷² Ibid.

end of each month, and sent the test, and any other daily work they chose, back to their advisory teacher.

Advisory teachers were paid by the piece. As she recalls, it was \$1.50 for first or second grade, \$1.75 for third. Student assignments were not simply graded and returned, as the teachers worked many hours to make it as personal as possible. They wrote letters and commented on the work. Sometimes the parents and/or students wrote in with questions, needing some specific direction or requesting more materials. The advisory teachers did their best to meet the family's needs.

The advisory teachers went twice a week to pick up their mail from a central office. They took the lessons home, graded them, returned them to the central office, and then the lessons were mailed out from there. Mrs. Berryhill was an advisory teacher for eight years. During that time the teachers never had a central place to work, they all worked at home. Only the director, warehouseman, typist, and administrators had a central location to work.

Mrs. Berryhill remembers having a lot of fun:

We really felt that you developed a rapport with these people. And you admired what they were trying to do in these isolated places. Some of them did fantastically well. One of them went on to become a Rhodes scholar. So you know that what went on in some of these homes was tremendous. And the parents were pretty much doing it themselves.⁷³

To Mrs. Berryhill, the important thing for the correspondence teacher was to be encouraging and diligent about looking over the work. She remembers wonderful contact with the students through the mail and felt she was providing an important service; "The people were so appreciative, so grateful for any little direction you gave them. It also helped us advisory teachers to stay in touch even though we were out of the school system. Everyone really felt good about what she was doing."⁷⁴

⁷³ Patricia Berryhill, interview. 11 May 1998

⁷⁴ Ibid.

The Alaskan-based, Calvert correspondence program quickly gained popularity. At the same time, Alaska continued to experience a large population growth due to the military build-up during the Cold War Era, so the Department of Education adjusted by expanding the scope of correspondence education. At the beginning of the 1961-62 school year they hired Mrs. Dorothy Johnson, an education specialist, whose job was to study correspondence programs in Canada and the Northwest United States, and "develop home study courses that would meet the needs of students in remote areas of Alaska."⁷⁵ She began with third grade, using textbooks adopted for use in Alaska. They distributed thirty-seven third grade courses around the state on a trial basis. The courses met the Department of Education's predetermined goals and they considered it a success. So, Mrs. Johnson was authorized to begin writing courses for fourth, fifth and sixth grades.⁷⁶

Mrs. Johnson became the first Director of Correspondence Study. In 1962, she gave a visual identity to the correspondence program, by conducting a contest in which the students came up with a title for a newspaper. Janelle Armstrong, of Spenard, Alaska, chose the winning title...*Scattered Chatter*.

The first *Scattered Chatter* contained a welcome message from the Commissioner of Education, Theo J. Norby.

You are a member of the most interesting and unique "classroom" in the world. It is unique because the students are scattered over such a large area and separated by miles of varied terrain. Your "classroom" forms a huge equilateral triangle in shape with about 1,500 miles between each point. Val and Steve Holmes are located at Chernofski Harbor in the western Aleutian Islands about 1,500 miles from Pat and Richard Kristovich at Hyder on the southeastern border of Alaska. At the third point of the triangle are Linda and

⁷⁵ Report of the Commissioner of Education Biennium Ended June 30, 1962, (Department of Education, State of Alaska) p 24

⁷⁶ *Ibid*.

Paul Peyton and Bill Brewer at the Arctic Research Laboratory about five miles from Barrow.⁷⁷

Scattered Chatter was an annual compilation of contributions from students. This included pictures, short stories, poetry, and news about their lives. It was a means for them to get to know one another. Some of the students became pen pals and began to feel a sense of cohesiveness. There were pictures of the advisory teachers and staff, along with words of encouragement for the next year.

Scattered Chatter brought life to Alaska's Correspondence program, and it seemed to be the beginning of a new phase. When the Department of Education brought advisory teaching and correcting services to Alaska, and began producing their own courses, correspondence education gained a personality. Correspondence study became an established Alaskan institution.

⁷⁷ Scattered Chatter, Department of Education, Correspondence (State of Alaska) 1962 p2

Chapter Three

Statewide Growing Pains: Decentralization of Home Education 1960-1975

The success of Mrs. Johnson's third grade curriculum encouraged the growth of Alaska's Correspondence program. Mrs. Johnson's curriculum was more relevant to Alaska's remote children than was Calvert School's, which is located on the East Coast of the United States. The children loved it, so Mrs. Johnson wrote similar courses for grades four, five, and six in 1962-63. She completed the seventh and eighth grade curricula in the spring of 1964. Mrs. Johnson hired Mrs. Margaret Justice, Education Specialist, for the summer, to develop lesson manuals for grades one and two.¹

According to Mrs. Justice, Dorothy Johnson was getting tired of writing curriculum and asked Mrs. Justice if she would like to work in correspondence and write the first grade curriculum. Mrs. Justice was thrilled at the opportunity. She remembers that they were writing the curriculum instead of getting it from Calvert School.² In the 1965 *Scattered Chatter*, Mrs. Johnson stated that by the first of July the Department of Education courses would be ready to be distributed to all elementary students, grades 1-8, "in remote areas upon request."³

Commissioner William T. Zahradnicek's 1965-66 *Annual Report* stated that the program served 237 elementary students that year, with a team of five advisory teachers correcting the coursework for these students. The total cost for the state was \$120, per elementary student, per year. They ordered high school courses from the University of Nebraska at a cost of \$30 per course.⁴

¹ Scattered Chatter. Department of Education, Correspondence Division (Alaska) 1965 p1

² Justice, Margaret, Interview 12 May 1998

³ Scattered Chatter. 1965 p1

⁴ State of Alaska Department of Education 1965-66 Annual Report , December 1966 pp19 & 49

It is interesting to note the people that the correspondence program was now serving. The 1965 *Scattered Chatter* solicited potential pen pals from the correspondence population, revealing the parent's occupations. Alaska's correspondence home study program had expanded, revealing the changes in statewide economics. The program still served the miners, trappers, fox ranchers, fish buyers, owners of trading posts, cannery workers and others in isolated places.⁵ Alaska's economic base was growing and diversifying, increasing the population in the rural areas, as Alaska's road system more than doubled during the Cold War boom.⁶ New correspondence members included: construction workers, carpenters, electrical technicians and commercial artists.⁷ The growth of the program prompted the Department of Education to become more creative in finding educational solutions for its rural students. Some of these solutions affected the correspondence program.

The Department's policy of purchasing courses from the University of Nebraska for its high school students, underwent some changes when, in 1967, the State of Alaska implemented the Boarding Home Project for its rural students. In an attempt to bring a quality education to Alaska's rural students, the Boarding Home Project brought students, from the villages and the Bush, into the larger population areas such as Anchorage and Fairbanks, where they resided with local families and attended the local high schools. This reduced the high school correspondence enrollment from 117 students in 1965-66, to 98 students in 1966-67.⁸

Although high school correspondence student numbers decreased, the number of elementary students enrolled in the program continued to grow. Commissioner of Education, Cliff R. Hartman, encouraged these students in the 1967 *Scattered Chatter*:

It takes a great deal of self-discipline to be a good correspondence student. There often is no teacher to structure or schedule the day's activities. In some ways this is unfortunate and yet correspondence students develop better study habits and self-direction than those

⁵ *Scattered Chatter*. 1965 p75

⁶ Naske, Clause-M and Slotnick, Herman E., *Alaska A History of the 49th State*, 1987 pp136

⁷ *Scattered Chatter*. 1965 p75

students in regular classrooms, who often become too dependent on teachers for knowledge and experience.⁹

The 1968-69 school year revealed a tumult of activity within the correspondence program. The elementary correspondence students began receiving more than the basic curricula services as the staff determined to enrich the curriculum. They offered home economic units in the seventh and eighth grades,¹⁰ and library books, serviced through the State Library System.¹¹ The Correspondence Study Supervisor, Hattie L. Bunes, oversaw the growth and changes in the program, and the revision of courses as she conducted advisory teacher conferences, evaluated transcripts and report cards, made grade level assignments, awarded completion certificates and supervised student progress for the elementary students. She coordinated student enrollment for high school students, recorded maintenance and transcript evaluations, and awarded diplomas. In 1968-69, Mrs. Bunes visited the administrators and students of correspondence study programs in the boroughs of Anchorage, Fairbanks and Ketchikan areas.¹²

While the correspondence program was experiencing growing pains, the education of students in the rest of the state was in tumult. Neither, the State and Federal Regional Boarding Schools, or the State Boarding Home Programs were successfully serving all rural students. Critics and policy makers agreed that a unified state system was necessary under the State of Alaska.

However, the state did not have the money to unify the system. Fortuitously for Alaskan education, oil was discovered in Prudhoe Bay in 1968. The ensuing sale of oil leases netted the State of Alaska \$900 million. This effectively removed Alaska's financial barrier.

By 1970, the State Department of Education was better equipped to respond to the needs of rural students. The Department created a new state organization, the Alaska State-Operated School System (ASOSS), to run the 130 state schools located across the

⁸ State of Alaska Department of Education 1966-67 Annual Report. January 1968 p18

⁹ Scattered Chatter. 1967 p.i

¹⁰ State of Alaska Department of Education 1966-67 Annual Report. January 1968 p18

¹¹ State of Alaska Department of Education 1967-68 Annual Report. November 1968 p19

¹² State of Alaska Department of Education 1968-69 Annual Report. December 1969 p13

state in the rural areas, collectively known as the "unorganized borough." ASOSS's board of directors took some authority over rural schools previously held by the legislature and State Board of Education. Each school acquired a local advisory school board,¹³ thus overturning the abolishment of all rural and village school boards, executed by the 1933 Territorial Board of Education's cost-cutting actions. This opened the door for increased self-determination in rural areas.

However, the Alaskan Federation of Natives (AFN) did not think Alaska's Department of Education was doing enough for rural high school students. They claimed that Alaska State-Operated Schools were, "irrelevant to the experiences, traditions, and values of rural residents."¹⁴

This same concern for rural students appeared in the 1970 *Scattered Chatter*. W. Russell Jones, Jr., Director of the Division of Instructional Services reiterated the Alaska State Board of Education's newly adopted philosophy:

To provide each person in the state of Alaska with maximum opportunity to secure for himself the knowledge, competence, attitudes, and values necessary for complete realization of his fulfillment as an individual and as a healthy, productive, participating, and accepted member of society.¹⁵

Mr. Jones further explained that the educational needs of rural students were as important as urban students needs. He believed that correspondence courses met Alaska's need to provide each person with the opportunity to secure an education for themselves. Correspondence Supervisor, Hattie Bunes, helped develop the Department's new mission statement, because she believed that it fit in with the larger vision of the United States' desire to educate its own people. Mrs. Bunes pointed out that the desire to educate its own people was one of the reasons the United States of America became a great nation.

¹³ Getches, David H. Law and Alaska Native Education. (University of Alaska, Center for Northern Educational Research) Fairbanks, Alaska 1977 p24

¹⁴ McDiarmid, G. Williamson, Governing Schools in Culturally Different Communities: Effects of Decentralization in Rural Alaska. Doctoral Thesis (Harvard University) May 1984 p36

¹⁵ Scattered Chatter. 1970 p.iii

As can be seen, the State of Alaska was desperately trying to meet the needs of its rural students. Correspondence education was an important answer, and student enrollment continued to increase in both the elementary and high school. During the 1970-71 school year the Department enrolled 706 students, 445 elementary and 261 secondary. Hattie Buness attributed this growth to people moving to isolated areas of the state. She believed that the correspondence program was helping "the population of Alaska grow, by making it possible for our families in the remote areas to educate their children at home."¹⁶ The staff wrote a kindergarten course and accelerated the University of Nebraska services to secondary students. Hattie traveled all across the state visiting schools, students and staff. The correspondence school now employed one supervisor, five part time advisory teachers and five staff members, typists, and secretaries. The school was growing and the increased volume required the hiring of a warehouseman.¹⁷ Yet, the state was still not adequately meeting Alaska's rural educational needs, as evidenced by Alaska's non-correspondence rural students becoming frustrated with the system of having to leave their villages for secondary education.

This frustration resulted in a 1971 suit against the state, brought by five Native students from the Eskimo village of Kivalina, who wanted to receive their secondary education in their village. The state responded by expanding the Kivalina School through the twelfth grade in an out-of-court settlement.¹⁸ The State Board of Education changed their regulations as a result; "every child of school age shall have the right to a secondary education in his community."¹⁹ A similar suit was filed in 1972 on behalf of 28 rural Native students. This was the Molly Hootch Case (*Hootch v. Alaska State Operated School System*). The Alaska State Supreme Court decided that the state was not constitutionally bound to provide secondary education in each students' village. This case, which dragged on for four years, set into motion a series of events that changed the course of education, certainly correspondence education, in the State of Alaska.²⁰

¹⁶ Scattered Chatter. 1971 p.iv

¹⁷ State of Alaska Department of Education 1969-70 Annual Report. December 1971 pp18

¹⁸ McDiarmid, G. Williamson Governing Schools in Culturally Different Communities. 1984 pp35
 (4 Alaska Administrative Code 06.020 repealed and re-enacted effective July, 1974)

²⁰ McDiarmid, G. Williamson Governing Schools in Culturally Different Communities. 1984 p35

Meanwhile, in August 1972, Mrs. Margaret Justice, who worked the summer of 1965, came back on staff as the new Supervisor of Correspondence Study. She had left correspondence study to pursue a doctorate in early childhood education from the University of Syracuse, New York. As the new supervisor, she revamped the way the advisory teachers "taught" correspondence education and proceeded to create such a political stir that the course of correspondence education in Alaska was forever changed.

The Battle to Keep State Correspondence Education 1972-1975

Mrs. Justice's philosophy was to bring more individualization of services to each student. She found some of the corrections that the advisory teachers made, "stifling. They would go through and check things wrong and put a 'C' or a 'B' on it."²¹ She spoke to the teachers and exhorted them to be more personal.

These people are out in the Bush. I mean the Bush! Because I've been out there in elementary education for years, in a cabin down in the middle of nowhere, with wood smoke coming out of the chimney. So, I knew the trappers and the people in lumbering, in boats and mining and lodges. These people were the ones we were serving...What you have to do is compliment them. Compliment them on what they've done and say "maybe you could..." So all this began to change into a personal vibrant kind of instruction because I rechecked every lesson before it was mailed...every child.²²

In the 1973 *Scattered Chatter*, Mrs. Justice prophesized that many exciting changes were on the way. She planned on implementing more individualized programs of study that were more relevant to the Alaskan lifestyle. Each mailing was to include more enrichment materials and more creative learning packages. Her final desire was to foster closer associations between the teachers, parents and students.²³

In order to expedite these changes, Mrs. Justice appeared before the Board of Education on February 1, 1973. She asked for an increase in her budget; permission to revise the 10-year-old curriculum; and provision for "special education equipment and

²¹ Margaret Justice, interview. 12 May 1998

²² Ibid.

²³ Scattered Chatter, 1973 p.i

vocational education and equity in the expenditures for correspondence students."²⁴ The Board acted and moved to emphasize, "the quality of education received by correspondence students shall be as nearly as possible on a par with education levels of the students attending public school."²⁵ The motion carried. The legislature increased the correspondence budget from \$188,200 to \$300,000.²⁶

Mrs. Justice achieved huge gains. During the 1973-74 school year there were 830 registered students who "could not or did not wish to attend a regular school facility."²⁷ She sent out seven monthly newsletters, and questionnaires about the program to all families. Results showed that the people wanted to continue receiving newsletters and that 98% of the parents believed that all Alaska's children should have the option of using Correspondence Study courses.²⁸ The correspondence school began using course offerings from the American School, as well as, University of Nebraska, for high school students. Purchasing courses from the American School increased the variety of courses available to high school students through Correspondence. Now, instead of the students sending their coursework and tests straight to the universities, they began routing these lessons through the Juneau office.²⁹

Other changes included the selection and/or development of career education and vocational orientation materials. The correspondence school purchased new art, spelling, English and science texts, and revised parent manuals. The school was able to provide special assistance to 50 high school and 24 elementary students with learning difficulties. A home-teacher training session occurred in Fairbanks. The school also began sending some students to events within Alaska and outside of the state. "Three students were sent to Alaska State Council on the Arts' summer camps. For the first time, high school students were notified of state and national competitive programs." One student won a National Exploration Scholarship, an all expense paid trip to New Mexico to work with an archeological team for two weeks. Mrs. Justice also worked with the school districts that

²⁴ Minutes of the State Board of Education. Twenty-fifth Regular Session, February 1 and 2, 1973 p3

²⁵ Ibid. p6

²⁶ 49er, (Department of Education) 7th Edition, April-May 1974

²⁷ State of Alaska Department of Education 1973-74 Annual Report January 1975 p18

²⁸ Ibid.

²⁹ Ibid.

had correspondence students living in their area. Funding for correspondence increased from \$145 to \$250 per student.³⁰

Jeff C. Jeffers, Director of Instructional Services, applauded these changes when writing to the students in the 1974 *Scattered Chatter*. "Mrs. Justice has excelled in her efforts to win legislative support of your program, and as a result you should benefit from more up-to-date and broadly selected materials and, hopefully, more consultative assistance too."³¹ Mrs. Justice also set up postage paid service to and from the students.³²

Mrs. Justice remembers that her students lived all over the state. The school had to be careful packaging curricula and lessons because there was no transportation to some of the homes. "The plane would have to go over the top [of the residence] and drop a box of books, if we weren't careful enough to get them in early enough that they could land on the rivers."³³ Sometimes the school did not hear from their students for months because there was no way for the families to mail their lessons back to the school.³⁴

Sheila Peterson went to work as an advisory teacher for Correspondence Study, in the spring of 1973, as an advisory teacher. She remembers her few years there as a time of great transformation. This was due to the many changes occurring in the statewide system of schools.

Some of these changes came about because of research conducted in 1973. Dr. Judith Kleinfeld, a professor at the University of Alaska Fairbanks, published the results of a most revealing study concerning boarding schools and boarding home programs in Alaska. This research documented the high level of school-related social and emotional problems inherent with these programs. In the same year, Commissioner of Education Marshall L. Lind asked the Center for Northern Educational Research (CNER) at the University of Alaska, to examine possible options for secondary education in the state. CNER's study blasted the Alaska State-Operated School System's "inefficiency, insensitivity," and accused them of, "detering the development of local leadership and

³⁰ Ibid.p18

³¹ *Scattered Chatter*. 1975 pp2

³² Ibid.p3

³³ Margaret Justice, interview 12 May 1998

³⁴ Ibid.

self-determination."³⁵ The authors recommended that the [State-Operated] schools, "be placed under the jurisdiction, not of a statewide system, but rather under smaller districts and municipalities."³⁶

The Alaskan Federation of Natives (AFN) and other Native groups lobbied the Ninth Legislative Session to procure legislation that encompassed CNER's recommendations. Their efforts resulted in the passage of Senate Bill 35 on June 9, 1975.³⁷

In 1974, the Board of Education also took up the issue of alternative education and the correspondence program. The Division of Budget and Management requested that the Department of Education examine the "feasibility and desirability of allowing school districts to use correspondence study as an officially recognized alternative educational program with support under the foundation program."³⁸ SB 35 set up Regional Education Attendance Areas (REAs) that conformed to the boundaries of the Native regional corporations set up under the Alaska Native Claims Settlement Act (ANSCA) of December 1971. These district lines were drawn so as to "maintain linguistic, socio-economic, and cultural homogeneity, and to reflect the realities of transportation, communications, and geography."³⁹ SB 35 allowed local school boards to set policies for their schools. It obliterated the Alaska State-Operated School System and decentralized education across the whole state.

The decentralization of statewide public education had far-reaching ramifications for the correspondence program. As a result, the Department of Education sought to decentralize correspondence education and transfer it to the local school district level. The staff and teachers of Correspondence Study did not think decentralization was in the best interest of their students. This became a very controversial topic and appeared frequently at the State Board of Education Meetings.

³⁵ McDiarmid, G. Williamson, Governing Schools in Culturally Different Communities. 1984 p36

³⁶ Ibid.

³⁷ House Journal. Alaska State Legislature 9th Legislature 1st Session 1975 p1664

³⁸ Minutes of the State Board of Education. Thirty-Third Regular Session, June 4 and 5, 1974

³⁹ McDiarmid, G. Williamson, Governing Schools in Culturally Different Communities. 1984 p37

Sheila Peterson remembers the controversy:

At the time, the Department of Education decided state-operated schools should be decentralized, that they should go back to the local people. So, they set up the REAAs. Well, there was a philosophy that the correspondence program, which was centralized here in Juneau, with very little funding, should be decentralized, that the program should go to these REAA's where these families were living, and the [children in the] rural communities should be given the opportunity to go to school in those areas. Also, that those school districts should provide the education for those students.⁴⁰

The Board of Education met in March 1975, at which time Correspondence Supervisor, Mrs. Justice appeared before them and expressed her concern about the fact that no one in Correspondence Study had been consulted about "changing the program to local control."⁴¹ She asked the Board to study the issue further and to "rescind the action to decentralize the program."⁴² Sheila Peterson and Cybil Davis, correspondence advisory teachers, were concerned for the welfare of their students. They also appeared before the Board and discussed the role of the Department of Education in the transitional process. The Board assured the ladies that the Department would maintain a leadership role by "providing materials and training the districts to meet the special needs of the correspondence students."⁴³ Mr. Ken Grieser, who was an intern for the position of Deputy Director of Field Services, examined the correspondence issue and outlined, for the Board, the Department of Education's responsibilities:

- It was the Department's duty to give the responsibility and funding to the districts for teaching these students.

⁴⁰ Sheila Peterson, interview. 13 May 1998

⁴¹ Minutes of the State Board of Education. Thirty-seventh Regular Session, March 3 and 4, 1975 p12

⁴² Ibid.

⁴³ Ibid.

- The services that cannot be provided by the districts, like materials development and appropriate materials and course development, will be taken care of by the Department.
- The Department should not be in the business of directly operating programs for schools districts, i.e. correcting papers, giving grades, etc.
- The Department should be more concerned with providing leadership and training to the districts that are operating their own programs.⁴⁴

The Board requested a report dealing with potential transitional problems in decentralizing correspondence study and directed the Department of Education to proceed with decentralizing the correspondence program.⁴⁵

Mrs. Justice did not agree. Neither did the parents involved in correspondence study. They did not see any economical feasibility in decentralizing correspondence and were very pleased with the education their children were receiving. Mrs. Justice wrote each correspondence family and told them that the Board of Education intended to decentralize their program, without informing them of the changes, and that it would adversely affect their children's education. The parents responded loudly, and united together with the Correspondence Office to fight the Board of Education's decision. At the next Board of Education meeting, the Board directed the Department to focus on equipping the local school districts "to meet the special needs of correspondence students."⁴⁶ Mrs. Justice and several parents appeared before the Board and let them know they did not favor decentralization. The parents expressed concern about losing the recent innovations in the correspondence service and their children would experience gaps in their education while the different districts set up their own correspondence programs.⁴⁷ They did not believe that the districts would be ready to undertake correspondence service within the allotted one-year period.

One district felt differently. The principal of Palmer's High School, Mr. Butler, did not think that was a problem. He told the Board that his school had experience with

⁴⁴ Ibid.

⁴⁵ Ibid.p13

⁴⁶ Minutes of the State Board of Education. Thirty-Eighth Regular Session, April 3 and 4, 1975 p3

⁴⁷ Ibid.pp4-5

correspondence students and was confident that his district could assume the operation of the correspondence program immediately.⁴⁸

Members of the House committee on Health, Education, and Social Services met with members of the Board and further discussed the decentralization of the correspondence program. The Chairman of the committee made it known that Governor Jay Hammond backed the Board of Education in this controversy.⁴⁹ The Board, in turn, assured the Governor that correspondence study would not suffer in quality, or services, for the students during the transition of the program to the districts.⁵⁰

Due the escalating level of conflict the decentralization issue was drawing, the Board felt it was necessary to restate their philosophy. They were dedicated to the transference of statewide educational programming to the local district level. Secondly, the Board was committed to either maintaining or improving the current quality of correspondence service.⁵¹ Board member, Dr. Nat Cole, explained to a local school board member, Sharron Lobaugh, that a "school district is obligated to offer an educational program for each child. If a student lives beyond the two-mile school bus route limit then the responsibility may be satisfied by correspondence."⁵² The Board proceeded to decentralize the program.

Apparently, the media exposed this battle. One board member, Mr. Darwin Heine, expressed frustration about the news releases and publicity over the decentralization of the correspondence program. He thought the media made the Board look as if they intended to leave children in the lurch if a district chose not to take over correspondence studies, due to the fact that the statewide correspondence program would not be there to help these children. A Mr. Van Houte pointed out to the Board that NEA-Alaska had been implicated as the prime force behind the elimination of correspondence study through the state operated program. He wanted it known that this was not the case.⁵³ The State Board

⁴⁸ Ibid. p5

⁴⁹ Ibid. p10

⁵⁰ Ibid.

⁵¹ Ibid.

⁵² Ibid. p11

⁵³ Ibid.

of Education deemed it important enough to publicize a position paper on Correspondence Study. It summarized:

The State Board decision of March 3, 1975, and reaffirmed on April 3, 1975, directs the Department to initiate a plan for the transition of the Correspondence Study operation from State to local district control: such transition to be based on mutual agreement and readiness between the Department of Education and the affected district. Direct operation of Correspondence Study services for students of the Unorganized Borough is to be maintained by the Department of Education, until such time as this function can be more effectively handled at a level closer to the students involved.⁵⁴

Sheila Peterson maintained that the Department of Education did not look at the correspondence issue from the school's perspective. She contacted Senator H.D. Meland, from Juneau, who was on the Senate Finance Committee. The advisory teachers were able to come before the Senate Finance Committee to testify and express their concerns about decentralization. The teachers thought the program "should be maintained and should be centralized."⁵⁵

The Senator was sympathetic to their cause and was apparently strong enough that the teachers never had to follow the bill through or testify before any more committees. The Senator drafted Senate Bill 367 for an act entitled: "An Act relating to correspondence study." SB367 provided for an "accredited elementary and secondary correspondence study program available to any Alaskan through a centralized office of correspondence study." The original sponsors in the Senate were Chancy Croft, Bill Ray, Jay Kertulla, and John C. Sackett. Sheila remembers that it was the last session of the legislature and everyone was very surprised that the bill passed through the Senate. When the bill passed over to the House [HB443 sponsored by Representative Susan Sullivan], an individual

⁵⁴ *State Board of Education Position Paper on Correspondence Study, Minutes of the State Board of Education, Thirty-Eighth Regular Session, April 3 and 4, 1975 p2*

⁵⁵ Sheila Peterson, interview. 13 May 1998

from Kenai convinced the legislature that if a school district wanted to have a correspondence program, they should be able to also.⁵⁶ They amended SB367 by adding a new paragraph: "is enrolled in a full-time program of correspondence study approved by the department; in those school districts providing an approved correspondence study program, a student may be enrolled either in the district correspondence program or in the centralized correspondence study program." SB367 also changed the funding formula, allowing the State Correspondence Study Office to receive full foundation support for the first time in history. This enabled each correspondence student to be counted as a regular public school student. Public school students historically received a higher level of funding than correspondence students.

SB367 not only kept centralized correspondence study (now named CC/S), but allowed districts to offer a correspondence option. The correspondence option also became available to anyone in the state by adding a paragraph to the Compulsory Attendance Law: "A full time-program of correspondence study approved by the department; in those school districts providing an approved correspondence program or in the centralized correspondence study program."⁵⁷ The school districts could choose to create their own correspondence curriculum and methods, or contract for CC/S's already established curriculum. SB367 took the two-mile distance restriction off correspondence participation and opened it to all students in the state.

SB367 opened up options for the Alaskan correspondence student. Never before had these rural families had a choice on the methods they used to educate their children, at home. Now a student could to use one of two publicly funded options; statewide correspondence (CC/S), or a district level option.

Governor Jay Hammond signed the bill, June 25, 1975 (Chapter 190, SLA 1975).⁵⁸ Mrs. Justice was pleased with the passage of the new law and wrote this reaction to the legislation:

⁵⁶ *Ibid.*

⁵⁷ AS 14.30.010 paragraph 10

⁵⁸ *Senate Journal Alaska State Legislature 9th Legislature 1st Session 1975 pp1542*

Our staff feels this particular bill is a good one-more democratic than most that make their way into State law. This legislative action affirms choices for everyone concerned. We here foresee some confusion for a period of time but decisions will soon be made and we can all expect smooth sailing in the future.⁵⁹

However, the future did not contain calm seas for the key players. Mrs. Margaret Justice, Sheila Peterson and other advisory teachers, that took part in the passage of this bill, paid for it with their jobs. The teacher's contracts were not renewed.

The day the legislature ended, Mrs. Justice got a memo from Marilou Madden, Director of Educational Program Support, stating that Mrs. Justice was no longer Correspondence Study Supervisor but was now a curriculum writer and had to move over into the Department of Education in the State Office Building. This was a demotion for Mrs. Justice. She believes this was retribution for going over the Department of Education's head.⁶⁰

The personal price paid for this victory was very high, but this piece of legislation doubled the scope of Alaska's experiment in home education by opening up correspondence education to all students in the state and giving children, learning in the home, a choice of home schooling options.

While this correspondence battle raged the *Hootch v. Alaska State-Operated School System* Case finally reached the Alaska State Supreme Court in 1975. The court decided that the State was not constitutionally obligated to provide secondary education in a student's home community. The Court "returned the case to the Superior Court for adjudication of the charge that the plaintiffs' constitutional guarantee of equal protection before the law had been violated."⁶¹ The new case, known as *Tobeluk v. Lind*, reached an agreement in 1976, and The State Board of Education changed its regulations to read; "every child of school age has the right to a public education in the local community in which he

⁵⁹ Unpublished notes written by Mrs. Margaret Justice on a copy of HB367.

⁶⁰ Mrs. Margaret Justice, interview. 12 May 1998

⁶¹ McDiarmid, G. Williamson, Governing Schools in Culturally Different Communities. 1984 p35

resides."⁶² The state committed to provide secondary education for Alaskan Native communities as it had in the predominately white communities beginning during Territorial days.

The Molly Hootch and *Tobeluk v. Lind* cases brought a high school to each village that wanted one. Few rejected them. While the State of Alaska, with its newfound oil wealth, built high schools in almost every village across the state, correspondence home education continued to blossom and grow.

Linda Kadrlick, formerly Linda Schultz, began working as an advisory teacher for CC/S in the summer of 1975.

It was a school in extreme transition. I was hired for the summer on part time to finish up the kids in—I think it was sixth through eighth grade, because the program was going to go away in the fall. They were sure that it was just going to shut down so they hired me and a couple other teachers in the interim to just close the thing out and so as you know, it never happened. They got a new administrator and they just continued with the program.⁶³

Wanda Cooksey, former guidance counselor, became the new Correspondence Supervisor. When she walked in the door, there were five half time teachers, an administrative assistant, a clerk typist and a person who worked in the warehouse shipping supplies.

By the time I started working there, it was open to all Alaskans and were they writing temporary emergency regulations to put this all in place. So the first thing I did was hire those teachers full time, and hire some more, because as word got out, we had more and more students.⁶⁴

⁶² 4 AK. Adm. Code 05.030

⁶³ Linda Kadrlick, interview. 12 May 1998

⁶⁴ Wanda Cooksey, interview. 9 May 1988

Before Mrs. Cooksey became Correspondence Supervisor, funding for correspondence was a line item appropriation. The Department would ask for an amount and it was up to the legislature to fund it. SB367 changed funding from a line-item appropriation to the foundation program funding by formula. Now the Department of Education counted the number of students in the program and that generated the funding. Because of this, CC/S had money. Wanda Cooksey remembers that CC/S enjoyed the favor of the legislature. "The legislature liked this program. They funded it at the statutory formula, but they also liked it and were very supportive when things came up that weren't as favorable to the program."⁶⁵

The program simply mushroomed. Mrs. Cooksey appeared before the Board of Education, in March 1976, and gave a status report of the correspondence program. She reported that she had sent out surveys and would soon know how many students there would be for the next school year. The students of CC/S organized, by mail, a student body, wrote a constitution and elected officers. A Parent's Advisory Committee met and delivered recommendations for correspondence.⁶⁶

Sheila Peterson was rehired a year-and-a-half later, in the winter of 1976, and returned to work as an 7th and 8th grade advisory teacher. She noticed a big difference in CC/S. Mrs. Peterson remembers that the program had "just blossomed." There were a greater number of students and additional dollars to provide these students better services.⁶⁷ Due to the budget increase for CC/S, the teachers could afford to do extracurricular activities with their students. She worked with the 7th and 8th grade peer group, which she expanded to include high school students. She had worked with these same students when they were in elementary grades and remembers, "that it was fun to have a chance to actually meet them."⁶⁸ CC/S flew in students from Southeastern Alaska, Ambler, Eagle, Central, Chugiak, Anchorage, Tok, etc., and hiked one of the former Gold Rush trails; the Chilkoot Trail.⁶⁹

⁶⁵ Ibid.

⁶⁶ Minutes of the State Board of Education, 45th Session, March 4-5, 1976. pp10-11

⁶⁷ Sheila Peterson, interview. 13 May 1998

⁶⁸ Ibid.

⁶⁹ 49er vol.5 no.9 Summer 1977 pp5

It was a really fun experience for the kids from all parts of Alaska who had grown up in the rural communities and had not had a chance to have any class activities.⁷⁰

The school's growing pains produced intense changes. CC/S began writing high school curriculum and "Alaskanizing" materials for correspondence courses. They continually upgraded elementary curriculum, and added a GED program (1979). The school's newspaper, *49er*, (begun in 1974), changed from a personalized newsletter that introduced new students and displayed their artwork and writings, to a more professional looking flyer that contained no student input. Enrollment went from 537 (CC/S) students in 1977, to 1182 (CC/S) students in 1984. Wanda, a prolific writer, produced voluminous progress reports between 1978-84. The reports list achievements, both by the school and by exceptional students, student activities, as well as, statistics and goals for the future. A condensed synopsis follows.

Total Budget and Enrollment per Fiscal Year⁷¹

Year	Budget	CC/S Enrollment
FY76	\$650,000	399
FY77	\$907,500	523
FY78	\$1,004,360	870
FY79	\$1,210,265	808
FY80	\$1,357,057	890
FY81	\$1,798,000	926
FY82	Not Available	1033
FY83	Not Available	1154
FY84	\$2,446,000	1182

⁷⁰ Sheila Peterson, interview. 13 May 1998

⁷¹ Centralized Correspondence Study Progress Reports. 1978-1984, Department of Education, Juneau, Alaska

Education in Alaska: Report to the People. 1976-77, Department of Education, Juneau

CC/S Achievements ⁷²

- Constant curriculum revision and development
- Contract services to district correspondence programs and students
- Procurement of grants
- Formation of Parent Advisory Committee (PAC)
- Advisory teacher visits
- Credit-by-contract
- Accommodations for special needs students
- Career Guidance and planning
- Extended Library Services
- Publications
- Home teacher workshops and conferences
- Alaskan Promising Practice Awards
- Adult Education (GED Program)
- Media usage
- Statewide correspondence workshops with districts
- Accreditation
- Summer Reading Program
- MERITS (Many Educational Resources To Share) Awards
- Administered College Entrance Exams
- Computer technology and hook-ups with students
- Audio Conferencing
- Summer School by mail

Student Achievements and Activities⁷³

- Chilkoot Hike
- Fine Arts Camp
- State Fair participation
- Government-in-action mini course
- Rural Student Vocational Program (RSVP)
- Various contests
- 4-H Programs
- High School graduation
- GED achievement
- Washington and Alaska Close Ups
- Spelling Bee
- Student Honors (including a Rhodes Scholar)

⁷² *Ibid.*

⁷³ *Ibid.*

- Student Leadership Conference
- Pen pals
- Student Government
- Academic Decathlons
- Outperformed mainstream public students on National and Alaska Achievements tests

One student enjoyed many of the activities and benefits of CC/S during this period of growth. Daniel Boone home schooled through CC/S, and partook in several activities offered through the school. Daniel's family lived in Eagle. He remembers the summers where they mined 70 miles north of Eagle when they were out of communication for five months.

We spent a lot of time in the winters, two or three days at a time, on the trail hauling supplies and we would go out there in late March and either finish our school work early or do a couple of months of lessons, which would probably not be mailed in until sometimes even in the middle of summer when somebody happened by that could take them to have them mailed.⁷⁴

He found the mandatory Physical Education classes a joke. His mother, believing that any child living in the Bush gets plenty of exercise, pointed out that they burned 20 cords of wood a year and that her children did all that work. She did not figure they needed any more exercise. The school also offered credit-by-contract so that students could get credit for their everyday life experiences. Daniel's sister raised a team of puppies, set up a dog team and received PE credit for doing what she was already doing anyway.

Daniel also had much to say about CC/S science. Science did not reflect the realities of life in the Bush, as they did not live in conditions where they could do reasonable lab experiments. "When you don't have electricity, running water, or space because of a cramped log cabin, setting up a bunch of experimental apparatus and doing a

⁷⁴ Daniel Boone, interview. 13 May 1998

chemistry experiment is very impractical. Even if it does succeed, there's no electric light to see what color the litmus paper turns because kerosene light is a different color."⁷⁵

Daniel's name appeared several times in the school's newsletter, the *#9er*, for taking part in many of the extracurricular activities offered by the school. He is grateful to CC/S for providing these opportunities. "It gave me what were really my only opportunities to get out of Eagle and get a sense of the wider world."⁷⁶ He attended: a Hugh O'Brien Leadership Foundation conference, several meetings of the Alaska Association of Student Governments representing CC/S, an Academic Decathlon, attended a six-week Fine Arts Camp in Michigan, and participated in a Rural Student Vocational Program (RSVP) at the University of Alaska Fairbanks computer department. As an RSVP student, CC/S brought Daniel into Fairbanks so he could partake in an intense, two-week internship in a field of career interest for the student. CC/S mailed him his diploma when he finished school.

Daniel applied to, and was accepted by, five different colleges, including Harvard. His theory was to apply at wealthy, exclusive Eastern colleges, knowing neither he nor his parents could afford it, because he; "being sufficiently exotic, might get in to satisfy their various cultural diversities sorts of things and get good generous financial aid grants, and it worked!"⁷⁷ It worked nearly perfectly. He attended Williams College in Massachusetts for four years and only had to borrow about \$20,000. The grants paid for the rest of his education. He does not think that was too bad considering at the time, an education at Williams cost approximately \$80,000 to \$90,000. CC/S lauded Daniel as one of their more successful students; he is now a lawyer in Juneau, Alaska. Daniel is an example of the country boy who stands a better chance of rising to eminence than his city counterpart, as the editor of the *Douglas News* pointed out in 1899.⁷⁸

Robyn Russell also home schooled through CC/S from first through 12th grade. Her family trapped in the winter, 75 miles north of Fort Yukon, on the Sheenjek River. Robyn was also a RSVP student and describes her experience when CC/S brought her into Fairbanks.

⁷⁵ *Ibid.*

⁷⁶ *Ibid.*

⁷⁷ *Ibid.*

⁷⁸ *The Douglas Island News* Wednesday, April 26, 1899 p2

I had a keen interest in being a writer so they put me on with the *Fairbanks Daily News-Miner*. I got to follow staff around, when they went on stories, a photographer took me with him when he shot and developed photographs. They had a very old-fashioned computer and I learned to write stories on that. They asked me to write a little article on other Rural Vocational Students, which I did.⁷⁹

The local news station aired a short clip of it on the evening news. The *Daily News-Miner* also ran an article she wrote about living on the Sheenjek River, in the *Northland News*, a newspaper for people living in rural areas. They encouraged her to write freelance, so she did. Her first check came from the *We Alaskans* magazine which is part of the Sunday *Anchorage Daily News*. It was for \$25.⁸⁰

Robyn was interested in journalism and thought she would pursue that at the college level. She won an ARCO Scholarship for \$1,500, and entered the University of Alaska Fairbanks in the Honors Program. After graduating with a B.A in Print Journalism she continued her education and earned a Master's of Library Science at University of Arizona Tucson. Robyn is an Oral History assistant librarian in the University of Alaska's Rasmuson Library Archives.

⁷⁹ Robyn and Lori Russell, interview. 6 March 1998

District Correspondence Programs vs. Centralized Correspondence

During the years the statewide CC/S program grew and prospered, the local school district correspondence programs, (set up by SB367), also grew. Some Alaskan districts purchased CC/S contract services. CC/S's staff also helped many districts transition into serving correspondence programs. The *Centralized Correspondence Study Progress Reports* yearly lists the districts that contracted for CC/S advisory teaching services, and how many curricula were sent to the local school districts that serviced the courses themselves.

CC/S perceived the need to help the districts get their correspondence programs running smoothly. Some districts were much better prepared to take on this task than others. Linda Kadrlick remembers CC/S's leadership role in this transition. "The districts were just starting up [correspondence education] and they had no idea how to do something like this. So we were like a helping hand to them for awhile."⁸¹ CC/S took the lead and hosted a conference in Juneau, in September 1977, for the purpose of:

...familiarizing participants with each other's materials and methods of teaching by correspondence, providing in-service and college credit options, providing excellent speakers and resources, and improving correspondence education in Alaska.⁸²

Almost everyone employed in a correspondence position in the state participated in the conference. Linda remembers CC/S hosting a conference for many years in Juneau. "We invited the district teachers down so they could see what we were doing and share what they were doing and maybe pick up something, or figure out a new course to buy for their kids and so forth."⁸³ Other districts began hosting the conference, to lift some of the financial burden off CC/S. After doing this for seven years, the participating teachers

⁸⁰ Ibid.

⁸¹ Linda Kadrlick, interview. 12 May 1998

⁸² Alaska Independent Distance Educators of Alaska 1995-96 Directory. p.i

⁸³ Linda Kadrlick, interview. 12 May 1998

decided to organize an association and release the districts and CC/S from the burden of hosting a conference. These participating CC/S and district teachers met together in October 1984 and agreed to call themselves IDEA (Independent Distance Educators of Alaska Association). The association formed for the "purpose of supporting quality independent and distance education as an alternative for Alaska's students; promoting conferences, panels, or other programs concerning independent and distance education; and to enhance the training and education of those involved in independent and distance education in Alaska."⁸⁴ At that time, 26 of Alaska's 53 school districts operated a correspondence study program.⁸⁵

In 1984, Interwest Applied Research, Inc., of Portland, Oregon conducted "An Assessment of Correspondence Study Programs in Alaska." The results of the study, released in January 1985, found the Department of Education concerned about the dual system of correspondence study programs available to students in the state. Apparently, this was not a new concern. Wanda Cooksey remembers; "There were several years where repeatedly the school [districts] administrator's group would have their annual meeting and pass resolutions to get rid of the [statewide] centralized correspondence study program and have the children come to their districts."⁸⁶ Rural communities receive a higher rate of funding, per student, than the districts in urban areas. Each child that left CC/S, and attended a local district correspondence program, added considerable money to the district's coffers.

Interwest visited all districts with a correspondence option, as well as, CC/S. They found the biggest problem "was that the 27 programs (26 local and CC/S) had little in common with one another. In the absence of any strong guidance or monitoring, the programs had developed a varied mixture of students, materials, policies and procedures."⁸⁷ They found no such thing as a representative correspondence program. Each district experimented with the way they delivered home education to their children and designed it to meet the needs. This research was designed to address the questions

⁸⁴ Ibid.

⁸⁵ An Assessment of Correspondence Study Programs in Alaska. "Executive Summary" Interwest Applied Research, Inc. Portland, Oregon January 1985 p3

⁸⁶ Wanda Cooksey, interview. 9 May 1998

about having a dual system of correspondence study programs available in Alaska. The results were anything but conclusive:

- Centralized Correspondence Study provides good instruction within the constraints of its mail-only orientation.
- It costs the state much less to enroll a student in CC/S than in any district program.
- Every district correspondence program involves face-to-face contacts with students; these local districts are, in fact, rarely true correspondence study programs.
- The quality of instruction provided by the local correspondence programs (just as with in-school programs) is quite variable.
- The instructional experience provided by CC/S is probably not as good as that provided by the best of the local programs; it is probably better than that provided by the worst of them. (But in the absence of any standards against which to judge quality, statements like this are only subjective judgments of trained observers; no objective determinations can be made.)
- The cost of running a local correspondence program varies dramatically, as does the percentage of per-pupil funding that is actually spent on delivering instruction to the program students. Districts generally spend less on correspondence students than has been allocated.
- It would be difficult (perhaps impossible) to develop regulation, or even guidelines, that were valid indicators of how a local program should be run. There is too much difference in the student populations and outcome goals of the district to make this a straightforward task.
- The Department of Education has not monitored local correspondence study programs and has neither extensively helped nor hindered the progress of local programs.⁸⁷

It is obvious that the study could not give conclusive direction to the Department, State Board of Education members, or the legislature as to which system, local or centralized, offered either a better or a more cost-effective program. The

⁸⁷ An Assessment of Correspondence Study Programs in Alaska 1985 pp5-6

passage of SB 367, which decentralized correspondence education, birthed a plethora of individual opportunities in home education for Alaska's children. Correspondence education still served the rural student, but increasingly it served as an alternative to mainline public education. The researchers agreed that there was no one answer as to whether local, or centralized, correspondence better served Alaska's students. Instead the researchers found a contradiction in policy that would require Alaska's legislature to straighten out.

- Section 14.070.020 of the *Compiled School Laws* says the Department of Education has to run a correspondence study program available to all students in the state.
- Section 14.14.090 says the local districts have to provide an educational program for every child residing in the district.
- These two laws are contradictory and need to be reconciled.
- Reconciling these two laws is a political task. There is no way to decide what to do based on the educational quality of the programs in question.⁸⁹

Both the centralized and the district correspondence options remained.

⁸⁸ *Ibid.* pp13-14

⁸⁹ *Ibid.* p16

Chapter Four

Their Own Way:

The Private Sector and the Battle for Exemption from State Education Laws 1985-Present

Alaskans are very independent and like to do things their own way. That includes raising children. Many Alaskans do not like to succumb to the trends of the lower 48. Many of us do not like federal government regulations and involvement in state and community matters. We have a wonderful environment and home schooling allows us the freedom to enjoy it to our fullest.

A Home School Mom

No matter which option a family chose, state or district correspondence, they still were accountable to certified teachers and a program. Some families needed that teacher contact for help and affirmation. Margaret MacKinnon, advisory teacher with CC/S, remembers visiting a family in Wrangell that was having trouble with their courses. She didn't do anything special for the students. Just the fact that she was there made it seem more real to them; to know there were people on the other end of the letters. The students turned around and submitted better work.¹ Margaret remembers some exhilarating times visiting families. She, and several other teachers, took a trip to Girdwood, following a home teacher, student and CC/S advisory teacher conference in Anchorage.

We went out to visit a family in Girdwood who lived on a homestead. They had a little mine out there and it was March. We drove down to a place where we parked, and they came to meet us—the mother and a son were on horseback, the dad and one of the

other sons were on a snow machine and one of the kids had his dog team. So, we got to travel in style about a mile back up in the woods and it was amazing. Coming out it was snowing. One of the teachers had to stand behind the snow machine in this little cart-like thing. We came down the hill and she let off a shrill scream that pierced the night sky. When we got down to the parking lot, she got off the snow machine and she looked like the abominable snowman with snow all around her fur-lined hood.²

Some parents receive itinerant advisory teachers into their homes and are glad to give some of the responsibility to the visiting teacher. Some school districts spend their correspondence funding buying materials, travel and teaching time of an advisory teacher.³

Other districts do not put so much emphasis on advisory teachers. Sharon Cartner, Fairbanks North Star Borough School District, Guided Independent Study, explained that the borough requires only one home visit per year. A parent can ask for more. Conversely, they can also refuse *any* teacher visits to their home.⁴

Not all advisory teacher visits are welcome in private homes. Linda Kadrlick remembers one such visit that started out very tenuous:

One time we were visiting a family in Southeast. Down here, of course, you either float or fly. So we happened to be flying that time and I will never forget when the floatplane approached the beach, this guy came out with a shotgun and wanted to know what we wanted. "Oh, we're just visiting your students!" We came in and after he calmed down it was fine.⁵

¹ Margaret MacKinnon, interview. 12 May 1998

² Ibid.

³ An Assessment of Correspondence Study Programs in Alaska. "Executive Summary" January 1985 pp2-

3

⁴ Sharon Cartner, interview. 17 October 1996

⁵ Linda Kadrlick, interview. 12 May 1998

Many parents do not appreciate the authority an advisory teacher can wield in their homes. In 1986, Steve McPhetres, Haines School District, explained that their half-time home school coordinator saw in-town students twice a week, remote students once a week. Her main function is "to see that kids on the program perform to acceptable standards. She was also responsible for making sure that the home environment is OK for the kids."⁶ Mr. McPhetres stated that over the last four years they uncovered one documented case of child abuse, discovered by the visiting teacher.⁷

This kind of report puts private home educators on edge. While recognizing that legitimate child abuse exists in some homes, abuse charges have been leveled against home schoolers in many states, by public education and government authorities competing for the control of the children, *because* these children are educated in the home. These charges have ranged from truancy, corporal punishment to child neglect.

A new breed of home educator emerged from the disenchantment of the government-run public school system. These parents, for either pedagogical or ideological reasons, do not believe that their children should be educated, or indoctrinated, by state or government-run schools, but rather should be instructed and nurtured by the family unit. These home educators, knowing their Constitutional rights and determined to be free from government intervention, set out to find a better way.

The *Tobeluk v Lind* case, settled in 1976, brought a rural high school into nearly every community. This expansion of high schools into the rural communities created a regulatory climate that began to stifle the private schools in Alaska. In 1983, the legislature passed what amounted to a complete deregulation of private schools, and created the "private exempt school." This removed the private schools from day-to-day oversight from the state. Now Alaskan private schools could choose to either; remain accountable to the state, having certified teachers, file paperwork, and subscribed to the curricular requirements that were required of public schools; or be exempt from most regulations. The exempt private schools were only required to provide attendance records

⁶ *Method: Alaskan Perspectives*, V.7, No.1 Winter, 1986 p26

⁷ *Ibid.*

on an annualized basis, meet immunization requirements, and administer standardized tests to grades four, six and eight. This exempt private school status opened the door for new options for the Alaskan home schooler.

The Emergence of the Private Home School Movement

It began in Talkeetna, Alaska in 1985. Debra Phelps wanted to teach her children at home, however, her husband, Jack, was not so sure. He knew home schooling was a tenuous legal issue. He spent an intensive year studying books and articles regarding home schooling, educational theory, legal ramifications of private education, and the emerging body of law on home education. Legal battles were being fought in different states, in the Union, between private versus public education. Two cases stood out as pivotal. One was the 1925 *Pierce v. Society of Sisters*, which stated that personal liberties were violated by an Oregon law that banned private schools.⁸ The other was *Wisconsin v. Dee Yoder*, where the state challenged Amish educational practices. These two cases went to the Supreme Court.⁹ Mr. Phelps remembers that the Court's decision essentially created a doctrine that said that the state had to show compelling state interest before it can infringe on parental rights to educate their children in the manner they see fit. When it does show a compelling state interest, its interference must be minimal, and take the least restricted means to achieve the compelling interest so that it has the least negative effect on the parent's decision.¹⁰ This is a most important doctrine because through it the Supreme Court constitutionally affirmed inherent parental rights to decide the educational environment for their children.

Mr. Phelps was now confident that his family had a right to home school their children.

It didn't matter what our state law said. Laws are transitory. Constitutional principles are less transitory. God-given principles are permanent. That is the hierarchy here. I was convinced of our right as human beings and our rights as members of the United States.¹¹

⁸ National Center for Home Education, *Issues Alert*, Paeonian Springs, VA May 1996

⁹ Jack Phelps, interview. 17 November 1999

¹⁰ *Ibid.*

¹¹ *Ibid.*

The State of Alaska had not shown any particular interest in regulating private home educators, however, it did not have any specific provisions that protected these home schoolers from any intrusion in the future, and that concerned the Phelps. They embarked on a trail of experiments, with the law and home education, which completely changed the face of home schooling in Alaska.

Mr. Phelps became a student of Alaskan educational law and infrastructure. Of particular interest was Alaska's Compulsory Attendance Law. It states, "Every child between seven and 16 years shall attend school at the public school in the district in which the child resides during each school term."¹² It also states that parents are responsible for making sure their children get to school. It lists twelve exemptions, including, a child tutored by a certified teacher, attending a private school, had a physical or mental condition making attendance impractical, resided more than two miles from either a public school or the bus route to it, enrolled in an approved, full time, correspondence program—centralized or district, etc.¹³ Mr. Phelps chose the eleventh exemption from compulsory public education to make his home school legal. The eleventh exemption stated:

If a child is equally well served by an educational experience approved by the school board as serving the child's educational interests despite an absence from school, and the request for excuse is made in writing by the child's parents or guardian and approved by the principal or administrator of the school that the child attends.¹⁴

The Phelps abided by the parameters set forth in the eleventh exemption from compulsory attendance, and went to the principal of their local public school, informed her that they were going to home school their children, showed her the educational program they would use, withdrew their children and began home schooling.

¹² AS 14.30.010

¹³ *Ibid.*

¹⁴ *Ibid.* Section 10 (B)

The Phelps were fortunate that the principal did not have a problem with them educating their children at home, but Mr. Phelps was not comfortable with the round-about way they had to get "permission" to educate their own children. He believed that it was a parent's right to educate their children at home and should not have to ask permission to do it. He searched for another way to home school his children legally. He found the path of least resistance, under Alaskan law, was to create a private exempt home school.¹⁵

¹⁵ Jack Phelps, interview. 17 November 1999

Private Exempt Home Schools

The State of Alaska, Department of Education had seven requirements for establishing a private home school. First, select a name for the school, which remained for the duration of the school's life, and choose a Chief Administrative Officer, normally a parent or guardian who gave them the title of principal, superintendent, director, etc. After that, the parents filled out several forms and sent them to their appropriate destinations.¹⁶

- **Affidavit of Compliance**—Filled out when the school first formed. Had to be notarized and sent to DOE. Only sent in during first year of operation and verified that the school maintained permanent records of physical examination, immunizations, standardized testing, courses given and academic achievement of each student.
- **Private and Denominational Schools Enrollment Report**--An annual report numbering students in each grade level.
- **School Calendar**—Under AS 14.45.110 a school year is set at 180 days. Calendars could fluctuate to fit the situation of the school, as long as it was in session for 180 days. A school year could be longer than 180 days.
- **Corporal Punishment Policy**—Each private school wrote a policy regarding the use of corporal punishment and sent it to the DOE. (4 AAC 42.200)
- **Private School Enrollment Reporting Form**—AS 14.45.110 required this form to go to the superintendent of the school district the child resided, for each child of compulsory school age enrolled in a religious or other private school.
- **Immunization Report**—Submit annual records of immunizations to the Department of Health and Social Services. Must also keep a copy at the school site. Home schools could exempt from filing this form.¹⁷

¹⁶ *Guide for Establishing a Private or Religious School, State of Alaska, Department of Education*

¹⁷ *Ibid.* p2

This was a lot of bureaucratic red tape to go through, however, the Department of Education sent everything together, in a packet, with complete instructions. This was the only way to have a legal private school in a home.

The law further required that the home school offer classes comparable to those offered in public schools such as: English, reading, math and spelling. It also required standardized testing, of each student, during their fourth, sixth and eighth grades. The results of the standardized tests remained on site at the school, which was the home.¹⁸ The State never asked for them. According to Harry Gamble, administrator with the Alaska Department of Education, the Department's role was to monitor these private exempt home schools on paper. "We do not go out to the schools to make sure that they are complying with the law, however, if they are not complying with the law, these parents are in violation of the State's Compulsory School Act."¹⁹ After meeting all the requirements on paper, the home school parent was free to make all the educational decisions for their children. Their curriculum choices were entirely up to them.

Many home educators followed this path over the years. Nine hundred and nineteen students were home schooled under the private exempt school status in fiscal year 1995-96.²⁰ Statistics are not available for any other year.

Mr. Phelps was still not satisfied, "What concerned me was that we did not have any assurance that the climate of non-regulation would continue because home schooling, per say, was never addressed in the law."²¹ Private home schoolers knew that the Department of Education wanted all Alaskan children in the public system, each child meant money. At this same time, battles raged in many states, of the United States, against home schoolers. According to the National Center for Home Education, the United States Constitutional protection of parental rights and family freedoms were being "misapplied by lower courts and agencies,"²² resulting in the violation of these rights.

¹⁸ AS 14.30.010; 14.45.120(b); and 14.45.120(a)

¹⁹ Harry Gamble. Alaska Department of Education. Unpublished *HomeSchool* Transcripts. 1996

²⁰ Alaska Department of Education, *Private and Home School Enrollment by District and Grade*. January 1996.

²¹ Jack Phelps, interview. 17 November 1999

²² National Center for Home Education, *Issues Alert*, Paconian Springs, VA May 1996

Alaskan home schoolers knew this was happening and were concerned that it could also happen here.

The Home School Legal Defense Association (HSLDA), founded in 1983, was at the forefront of these nationwide battles. HSLDA is a "non-profit advocacy organization established to defend and advance the constitutional right of parents to direct the education of their children and to protect family freedoms."²³ They are a membership organization, (\$100 per year), that provides advocacy in the courtroom in every stage of legal proceedings. They do this for their members, free of charge. HSLDA not only defends families, but often take "offensive action prosecuting a number of federal civil rights actions" for their members. They track federal legislation on Capitol Hill that affect home schooling and parental rights.²⁴

HSLDA also provides advocacy in state legislatures when invited by state home school organizations. They assist individual states in drafting language that improves the local home school legal environment and combats restrictive legislation.²⁵ HSLDA will not take cases that relate to public or private schools generally. They are specialists in home school law. Michael Farris, the founding attorney, is member of the Virginia Bar, as well as a few others, and has argued before the Supreme Court.

Mr. Phelps met Michael Farris early in his quest to modify Alaskan laws to meet the needs of home schoolers. Even with the two options available to private Alaskan home schoolers: register as a private school, or get an exemption from the local school board, Mr. Phelps realized that many Alaskans were reluctant to comply with either option. Their non-compliance put these home schoolers in violation of Alaska's compulsory attendance laws. Mr. Phelps believed that these Alaskans were at risk because at some point in the future, someone could arise who does not like the home schooling idea, or who "philosophically believes that nothing is good unless the state approves it."²⁶ The non-compliant home schoolers would be in a dilemma. Alaska needed legal provisions to protect these home schoolers.

²³ Home School Legal Defense Association Fact Sheet

²⁴ Ibid.

²⁵ Ibid.

²⁶ Ibid.

Mr. Phelps recognized the next step necessary for policy change: statewide organization. He spoke with organizers of state organizations in other states, and began developing a mailing list. He had about fifty-to-sixty names on the list. He teamed up with Mr. Bob Parsons, a fellow home school dad, and mailed letters to each one explaining that they believed Alaskan home schoolers needed to organize. "It seems there is going to come a time where we are going to need some ability to protect ourselves and make some changes."²⁷ Enough people responded positively to the mailing that Mr. Phelps and Mr. Parsons sent out another mailing, this time to around 120 families, stating that they would produce a newsletter and commit to holding a meeting or convention. They asked interested people to send ten dollars to help with postage. "I did this for a couple of reasons. I did not want to end up bearing all the cost myself. I learned a long time ago that if somebody really believes in something, you will find that out by how willing they are to put a dollar into it."²⁸ Thirty, or so, families responded and that was enough to begin the process.

They held their first convention in conjunction with a private school conference. The private school people lent the home schoolers a room and one of their speakers. Mr. Phelps and Mr. Parsons originally called the organization "Alaska Private School Association" (APSA).²⁹ Forty to fifty people attended the meetings where Mr. Phelps explained his concerns. He expounded the virtues of being unified, not only for political and legal reasons, but also for the benefit of the creative flow of education. The attendees responded positively.

Mr. Phelps put together a steering committee consisting of himself, Bob Parsons, Donna Chikov, Norman Green and the home school coordinator of Abbot Loop Christian School in Anchorage, who wrote bylaws and developed a structure for the organization. They discovered the acronym "APSA" already in use, so the name changed to Alaska Private and Home Educators Association (APHEA). Their mission statement emphasized that they would provide: "a networking agency to foster contact and interaction between various schools and homeschool groups throughout the state and,

²⁷ Ibid.

²⁸ Ibid.

"hold annual conventions, send out newsletters, and involve themselves in the political arena in order to foster a "climate of non-interference for private education in Alaska."³⁰

There was natural affinity between private and home schoolers. They both assert their freedoms to take a different educational approach from the state. They both believe that education is an extension of the family, not the state and pay for their children's education themselves. Some of the private schools, such as Abbot Loop Christian Center in Anchorage, and former Lighthouse Community Christian School (LCCS) in Fairbanks, spread legal umbrella coverage over families choosing to home school their children. This legal coverage was called the LCCS Home School Division. Home schoolers under LCCS Home School Division chose their own curriculum or purchased the curriculum the school used. The students had the coverage of certified teachers and could access the school's extracurricular sports programs, career counseling, cheaper standardized testing, participation in plays and graduation ceremonies. The school kept report cards, official transcripts and distributed diplomas.³¹ These home schoolers did not set up their own private school so they did not register with the state. These families, as well as, the privately registered home schools, and the families committed to non-compliance to any legal option, joined APHEA in numbers.

APHEA began holding their own convention every year in Anchorage, hosting keynote speakers, curriculum workshops, vendor displays, and conducting administrative meetings. APHEA always planned on going statewide, so they subsidized speakers and traveled to Fairbanks, Kenai, Juneau and the Mat-Su Valley for a few years. However, travel in Alaska is expensive and it became economically unfeasible to continue.

APHEA also took the official role of watchman on the home school wall and monitored proceedings at the state regulatory level. Their first confrontation came in 1986. The Board of Education considered banning corporal punishment in public schools. The Board decided that they should also look at regulating private schools also. They drafted a regulation banning corporal punishment in all Alaskan schools, including private schools. A significant number of home-schooled children were registered with the

²⁹ *Ibid.*

³⁰ APHEA Home page, (www.aphea.org)

state as a private school. Mr. Phelps testified before the Board in Fairbanks. He told them that, "under state law there are parents teaching their children at home under the auspices of a private school, which they have legally formed under Title 14. If you adopt the regulations you have proposed, you will be in a position of dictating to these parents that they may not spank their own kids."³² Jack Phelps remembers that Board member, Jack Chenoweth, responded in surprise. "Obviously, from the look on his face, I knew he had never considered such a thing."³³ Apparently, some members of the Board did not have a problem with this. Jack Chenoweth did. President of the Board, Janie Leask appointed Mr. Chenoweth to a committee of one, to meet with Jack Phelps and work out a solution to the problem.

This was the first step in the long trail of experimentation with changing Alaska's law. Mr. Chenoweth recognized that the Board did not want to put themselves in a conflict between parental rights and the State of Alaska. He knew the corporal punishment regulation for the schools would pass, so their goal was to not intrude on the private home schools. At the same time, Mr. Phelps also conferred with Michael Farris of HSLDA. Their discussions concerned not only the corporal punishment issue, but also the fact that Alaska's laws did not address home schooling specifically. Together, Mr. Phelps and Mr. Farris began the process of constructing new home school draft legislation.

Mr. Phelps and Mr. Chenoweth agreed that the law, as written, never envisioned private home educators. They also came to the same conclusion that the legal avenue of forming a private home school, was not a good solution for home schoolers. Mr. Phelps presented some ideas to Mr. Chenoweth. One idea included exemption from the compulsory attendance law. The current law provided for an exemption for approved correspondence programs. The law had CC/S and district correspondence programs in mind. Mr. Phelps thought that a definition of what constituted an "approved correspondence program," a likely next step.

³¹ Margaret Zody, interview. 15 November 1996

³² Ibid.

³³ Ibid.

Many accredited schools, besides Calvert, University of Nebraska and American School, offer correspondence curriculum. The majority of these are private, sectarian correspondence schools. Some of these schools include: Abeka, Bob Jones University, Christian Liberty Academy, etc. Mr. Phelps considered writing these schools into the law as other options. He realized this would not meet all Alaskan needs because many people chose other curricular options, or constructed their own, but it was a place to start.

The corporal punishment proposal underwent change and eventually banned it only from public schools. Chapter 42. Private Schools eventually read: "each private school that operates a pre-elementary, elementary, or secondary education program shall adopt a written policy governing the use of corporal punishment."³⁴ The regulation continued on, expanding the parameters governing corporal punishment. An exemption appeared in Section 5 (b), that displayed Mr. Phelps's and Mr. Chenoweth's collaborative effort:

The requirements of (a) of this section do not apply to a school in which only the children of a single family are enrolled and the schooling is provided by the parent or legal guardian of the children.³⁵

This was an important victory for APHEA. It brought credibility to the association in both the home school community and the State of Alaska's eyes. Especially important was the establishment of a cooperative relationship with the state. "We came to them and identified the problem. We did not rant about it; we said 'Here's a problem.' We agreed to meet with them to solve it. We achieved a solution that actually got them off the hook."³⁶

While APHEA's political side was forming, their conventions began to attract home schoolers from around the state. APHEA conventions provide a forum where home educators get together, see the latest at curriculum fairs, hear from speakers, receive

³⁴ 4AAC 42.200

³⁵ *Ibid.*

³⁶ Jack Phelps, interview. 17 May 1999

encouragement and meet with other home schoolers. APHEA helped identify local home school support groups, where they met, and how to contact them. They published this information in their newsletter, which circulated through a nationwide home schooling magazine called, *The Teaching Home*. Alaskan subscribers received pertinent Alaskan information in an attached centerfold of this national magazine. APHEA now mails out its own newsletter.

Mr. Phelps remembers that in the late 1980's, APHEA was pretty much a one-man show. His family still lived in Talkeetna, and all the mail came to him. The volume of mail quickly grew as people throughout Alaska and across the nation, wrote asking for information. A friend of Mr. Phelps, Roger Sherman, stepped in to help with the load.

Meanwhile, Mr. Phelps began establishing key relationships with people who eventually ascended to high places. Through a Department of Youth Services case that involved someone Mr. Phelps knew, he met and worked with Jack Coghill who, in 1990, became Lieutenant Governor, under Alaska's Governor Walter J. Hickel. Mr. Coghill was well aware of Mr. Phelps's work in home school conventions. During their campaign, Hickel and Coghill elicited help from Mr. Phelps to put out position papers on education. He agreed, but for a price. The candidates had to promise to "reconstitute the Alaska Board of Education."³⁷ Hickel and Coghill won, and proceeded to fire the entire seven-member Board of Education on December 7, 1990! Jack Phelps remembers the shock:

I never expected them to fire all seven! All I wanted was two or three spots [seats on the Board] for conservative votes, somebody that might know something about the private side of the world. When I helped them write their policy papers, it wasn't all about home schooling. It was more about what can we do to make education better in Alaska? There are some very serious problems out there in the public school system.³⁸

³⁷ Ibid.

³⁸ Ibid.

Governor Hickel hired Don Tanner as Director of Boards of Commissions. Mr. Tanner called Mr. Phelps a few days after the elections, whereby Mr. Phelps proceeded to lobby for the re-appointment of his friend, Mr. Chenoweth. Mr. Tanner surprised Mr. Phelps by asking for his resume. Following a tumultuous process, Jack Phelps became the seventh member of the Alaska State Board of Education.

The appointment of Jack Phelps to the Board of Education drew a flurry of protest. Some critics, such as the National Education Association (NEA), knew Mr. Phelps through his freelance writing days when he published a monthly newsletter of social and political commentary. The fact that Mr. Phelps was a representative of APHEA, and a known, Christian home school advocate, increased the level of controversy.

Mr. Phelps took his seat on the Board in January 1991. The law requires State Board of Education members to serve pending their confirmation. He served until May when critics successfully blocked his confirmation.

Even though Mr. Phelps was unseated from the Board of Education, the time he served was a home education victory, and furthered APHEA's cause and credibility. Never before, in the United States, had a recognized home school leader ever served on a board of education.³⁹ This was an extreme experiment in education that produced a success for the cause of home schooling, even if it was only for a short while. Mr. Phelps believes that he served fairly. Nothing ever entered the public record stating anything negative about his performance on the Board.⁴⁰ The Board of Education experience was not a total personal loss, as it helped open other doors for Jack, and the cause of home schooling education.

For the next few years, APHEA concentrated on public relations. Reporters began to write more articles highlighting home schooling. One article entitled, "For some, home work *is* school work," appeared in the *Juneau Empire* in April of 1993. It gave several vignettes of students who home school, citing positive statistics from nationwide surveys,

³⁹ Ibid.

⁴⁰ Ibid.

and talked about the options available to home schoolers in Alaska.⁴¹ Another article entitled, "Alternatives: When Public School is not the Answer," appeared in the *Heartland Magazine*, of the *Fairbanks Daily News-Miner*, in February of 1993. It reports the growth of home education around the state, and in the Fairbanks area, and cites reasons people are leaving the public school system. Dennis Eames, of KUAC public television station in Fairbanks, did a documentary on home schooling in 1996. He interviewed representatives of correspondence schools outside of Alaska such as; the University of Nebraska, American School and the University of North Dakota, who all spoke about the rise of home schooling in the United States. Dennis also interviewed local school district correspondence advisory teachers, and private home schooling parents and their children.⁴² These all helped the public image of home schooling in Alaska. The next step for Mr. Phelps was to educate the people who make the rules; the Alaska Legislature.

In 1993, Mr. Phelps disassociated with APHEA and went to work as a legislative aide for Pete Kott, (Representative from Eagle River), who was on the Health and Social Services Committee. The years spent as a legislative aide gave Mr. Phelps exposure to the legislature. He spent his own time distributing information packets about home schooling, to the members, at the beginning of each session. Mr. Phelps had in mind the draft legislation he and Michael Farris, of HSLDA, hashed out back in 1987. The two of them believed that the timing of the legislation was as important as the content. However, it required a legislature that was favorable to home schooling.

After a period of intense lobbying for home education, Mr. Phelps decided that it was time to test the waters. He wrote a resolution that he gave to Senator Mike Miller, (North Pole), a home school dad, who introduced it in the legislature on February 12, 1996. The resultant resolution, Senate Concurrent Resolution No. 25, (SCR 25), extolled the benefits of a viable home school community. It states:

⁴¹ Christianson, Susan. "For some, home work is school work," *Juneau Empire*, April 21, 1993

A RESOLUTION

Relating to supporting home schooling and establishing Alaska Home Education Week

WHEREAS home schooling is the fastest growing educational alternative in America; and

WHEREAS home schooling families contribute significantly to the cultural diversity important to a healthy society; and

WHEREAS Alaska has a significant number of parents who teach their own children at home; and

WHEREAS the state has always been a place where diversity and individualism have been championed; and

WHEREAS parents who provide education for their children at home exemplify the independent Alaska spirit; and

WHEREAS home schooling families tend to be strong, healthy families who contribute greatly to Alaska society; and

WHEREAS the cost of educating children at home is borne by the parents, thus saving money from the state general fund; and

WHEREAS home school students are proving themselves by excelling in college and in the state work force; and

WHEREAS the state's home school students are increasingly being recruited by colleges around the country because of their academic achievements;

BE IT RESOLVED that the Alaska State Legislature approves of home schooling as an important part of Alaska's educational infrastructure meriting state sanction and state protection; and be it

FURTHER RESOLVED that the Alaska State Legislature supports the right of parents to choose home schooling as the education alternative best suited for their children; and be it

⁴² **Eames, Dennis, unpublished *HomeSchool* Transcripts, 1996**

FURTHER RESOLVED that the Department of Education, school districts, and regional attendance areas are encouraged to cooperate with parents who are teaching their children at home; and be it

FURTHER RESOLVED that the Governor is respectfully requested to direct the commissioner of education to take whatever steps are necessary to ensure that the Department of Education, school districts, and regional educational attendance areas do not unnecessarily interfere with parents exercising their right to home school their children; and be it

FURTHER RESOLVED that the Alaska State Legislature establishes the week of October 13-19, 1996, as Alaska Home Education Week.

COPIES of this resolution shall be sent to the commissioner of education, the chief administrative officer of each school district and regional attendance area in the state, and the president of the Alaska Private and Home Educators Association.⁴³

SCR 25 passed without a dissenting vote and put the Alaska legislature on record as asserting the importance of home schooling in Alaska. This was a boost for home schooling. It actually put into words one of the foremost reasons home education prospered in the state: Alaska's diversity and individualism. The passage of SCR 25 and bequeathing October 13-19, 1996 (the week of the APHEA convention), as Alaska Home Education Week, affirmed the home school community, increased its continuity and public exposure, and helped it grow. It reflected Alaska's tenor about home schooling within the growing national trend.

Meanwhile, home schooling across the nation gained popularity and exposure as an educational alternative. Research and literature proliferated. Some examples include: Dr. Brian D. Ray, of the National Home Education Research Institute (NHERI), also began publishing a journal in 1985 entitled: *Home School Researcher*, which presents a peer-review, philosophical and academic forum for the latest breaking research. Dr. Ray also conducted several surveys, measuring the academic achievements of home schoolers. Dr. Ray's research dispelled many arguments against home schoolers by showing that they are not only high achievers, but also well-socialized and able to compete in the real world. Penny Verbruggen-Adams entitled her Master's thesis: A Handbook of Home Schooling:

⁴³ SCR 25 19th Legislature 2nd Session

an Analysis of the Home Schooling Movement. (1991) Jane Van Galen and Mary Anne Pitman edited a classic work entitled: Home Schooling: Political, Historical and Pedagogical Perspectives. (1991) HSLDA began broadcasting *Home School Heartbeat*; a two-minute daily radio broadcast, which "draws upon HSLDA'S considerable involvement and front line experience in the home schooling movement"⁴⁴

The home school population grew in the United States. In 1993, The U.S. Department of Education estimated that 350,00 children were home schooling, compared with 15,000 children during the early 1980's.⁴⁵ However, home school researcher, Dr. Brian Ray, estimates the 1993 numbers at about 800,000 children:⁴⁶ 1.15 million in 1996.⁴⁷ As the number of home-schooled children grew, so did the conflict, which kept HSLDA busy defending home schoolers in court. Home schooling, a hot topic in many circles, made its appearance in various state legislatures and on Capitol Hill. Alaska followed suit. However, Alaskan discussions about home schooling appeared more positive than the general home schooling reports in the Lower 48. Alaska had a favorable legislature that APHEA effectively educated about home schooling. The Alaska Department of Education was certainly educated during Mr. Phelps' five months service on the Board. The general public's knowledge about home education increased, and the home schooling constituency networked and became unified. Even the Commissioner of Education, Dr. Shirley Holloway, believed in home education. Dr. Holloway home schooled two of her own children, while she and her husband took a year's leave of absence to finish her doctorate degree. She also has grandchildren who home schooled successfully.⁴⁸ The passage of SCR 25, made it clear that the time to draft Alaskan home school legislation had arrived.

⁴⁴ Home School Legal Defense Association web page (www.hslda.org)

⁴⁵ Christianson, Susan, "For some, home work is school work," *Juneau Empire*, April 21, 1993

⁴⁶ Ray, Brian, *Home Schooling on the Threshold*, Salem, OR. 1999 p2

⁴⁷ Ray, Brian, *Strengths of Their Own*, Salem, OR. 1997 p5

⁴⁸ Shirley Holloway, interview. 15 June 2000

Alaska Deregulates Home Schooling

Senator Mike Miller and Jack Phelps worked together and modified Mr. Phelps' and Michael Farris's earlier draft legislation. They decided to experiment with a less moderate approach, Mr. Phelps remembers saying, "Let's go for broke. Why don't we completely deregulate this? Why don't we exempt a home school family from compulsory education?"⁴⁹ Michigan had recently passed legislation, favorable to home schooling, that stated that parents: "Establish and operate a home education program" and listed required subjects: "Reading, spelling, mathematics, science, history, civics, literature, writing, and English grammar."⁵⁰ Families are exempt from compulsory attendance if parents follow this guideline. Mr. Phelps believed that Alaskan legislation should model Michigan's law.⁵¹

Mr. Phelps approached Senator Loren Leman (Anchorage) with a new version of the Compulsory Attendance law. Senator Leman introduced this new version in Senate Bill 134.⁵² This added an exemption to the Compulsory Attendance law to provide, "for children schooled at home by a parent or guardian and is receiving an organized educational program that includes reading, spelling, mathematics, science, history, civics, literature, writing and English grammar."⁵³ Commissioner Holloway contacted Mr. Phelps and Senator Leman and arranged a meeting concerning SB 134. At this meeting, she inquired as to why they wanted the curricular clause in the bill. Mr. Phelps informed her that he was attempting to make the bill palatable for the Department of Education. Commissioner Holloway stated that part of the reason that home schooling is so successful is because, "it is not regulated."⁵⁴ She suggested that parents needed the opportunity to do what they think is best and that it would be a "cleaner bill" if the curricular clause was not there.⁵⁵ They dropped the curricular clause and the Committee Substitute for SB 134 (CCSB 134) was adopted, which added a paragraph to the

⁴⁹ Jack Phelps, interview. 17 May 1999

⁵⁰ Home School Legal Defense Association web page (www.hslda.org)

⁵¹ Jack Phelps, interview. 17 May 1999

⁵² Senate Journal, 20th Legislature March 12, 1997 pp695

⁵³ Minutes of the Health, Education and Social Services Committee, April 11, 1997

⁵⁴ Shirley Holloway, interview. 15 June 2000

⁵⁵ Ibid.

compulsory attendance policy (AS 14.30.010 (b)), providing an exemption for children schooled at home by a parent or guardian.⁵⁶

Committee discussion included recognition that there were, "no specific provisions in Alaska Statutes pertaining to home schooled students."⁵⁷ The members recounted the different ways current home schoolers comply with the law. They either, established a private school in their home, or participated in a government-sponsored correspondence course. However, neither provision was designed with private home schoolers in mind. Rachal Moreland, Senator Leman's aide, told the committee, "SB 134 codifies current practice by many home schoolers. Families in which children are home schooled are numerous throughout the state and their numbers are growing quickly. It is time we acknowledge them by law."⁵⁸

Representative Fred Dyson (Eagle River) further discussed the bill in the House of Representatives. He pointed out that, "Alaska has had a sympathetic administration which has been doing the right thing on slightly questionable grounds. This bill, codifying the process, is a good step and follows a national trend."⁵⁹

The streamlined (no curricula clause) SB 134 passed both houses and Governor Knowles signed it into law June 4, 1997 (68, SLA 1997). The law went into effect September 2, 1997.⁶⁰ The new exemption completely deregulated home schooling in Alaska. Jack Phelps recalls:

We added an exemption to the compulsory attendance statute. It is exactly that. It is an exemption. If you are home schooling, you are exempt from compulsory attendance. It's very clean. Mike [Farris, HSLDA] was just beside himself. He called me up and said, "Well Jack—Congratulations. *Alaska now has the best home school law in the entire nation.*"⁶¹

⁵⁶ Minutes of the Health, Education and Social Services Committee, April 11, 1997

⁵⁷ Ibid.

⁵⁸ Ibid.

⁵⁹ House Journal, 20th Legislature May 1, 1997

⁶⁰ Senate Journal, 20th Legislature July 10, 1997 p2086

According to Harry Gamble, Alaska Department of Education, the new law "recognizes home schools as a separate category of school."⁶² The new law exempts home schools from the Compulsory School Act and places only one requirement on them: "a home school is one in which the students are being taught by the child's parent or legal guardian."⁶³ He also stated that the Department was not planning to require anything more of home schools than what the Legislature already set in place. Mr. Gamble told home schoolers that they no longer had to: "fill out paperwork with the Department of Education, notify the local school superintendent or do anything else that is required of exempt private schools."⁶⁴

Another words, Alaskan home schools were completely deregulated. There was only one requirement for home schools. The children had to be taught at home by a parent or guardian. Since that is what most home schoolers do, SB 134 simply defined a home schooler, and then removed all regulations from them.

⁶¹ Michael Farris, Home School Legal Defense Association

⁶² Harry Gamble, Email of June 20, 1997 ah@beluga.com (no longer exists, address was changed to akhomeschoolers@onelist.com)

⁶³ Ibid.

⁶⁴ Ibid.

Chapter Five

The State Adjusts:

Tax-Funded Home School Assistance Programs IDEA 1997-Present

The complete deregulation of home schooling, a result of the passage of Senate Bill 134, sent a wave of joy throughout the Alaskan home schooling community. It was an amazing accomplishment in that it passed, basically, without opposition. Gerald Allsup, 1997 APHEA President, stated that, "from a legal standpoint, this ranks Alaska as the best state in the Union to educate your children."¹ He considered it "unfortunate that a statute had to be passed to protect what has been historically practiced and religiously understood as a God-given right and responsibility in our country."² Mr. Allsup wondered how Alaskans would use their newfound freedom from regulations in home education.

He did not have to wait long to find out. At the same time Alaskan home schooling was being deregulated, school district competition for the funding and control of Alaska's home educated children produced a new twist. The result sent many private home schoolers running into the arms of the public school system.

An innovative new experiment in state-funded correspondence, home education quickly arose across the horizon and drastically changed the face of home schooling in Alaska. It was the tax-funded, home school assistance program. This "idea" began as an experiment in Tanana, Alaska, with Paul and Merrily Verhagan.

Paul and Merrily began home schooling because their local school did not allow them to register their first-born child before she was five. They wanted to take full advantage of her teachable moments, as some children are ready earlier than others. The

¹ *APHEA Network News*. V.7, no.1 August 1997 pp3

² *Ibid.*

Verhagans reviewed their choices and decided to try home schooling. They believed that it was a parent's responsibility, not society's, to educate the children.

Society is there to assist the parents in seeing that their children obtain an education. The parents may call upon society to do that in the form of putting them into school. But it is really the parent's responsibility; the schools are there to assist.³

Mr. Verhagan realizes that many people do not think this way. "Most people have the attitude is that it is society's responsibility to educate their children and that parents are not heavily involved."⁴ In 1983, the Verhagans began using Alaska's state correspondence program, CC/S, because it was structured and well organized. They were new to home schooling and did not have a lot of confidence. CC/S provided them with all the support they needed. However, the Verhagans continued having children. "It was great for two children, and we could handle it with three children, but there is no way in the world we were going to be able to do all of the work that is required under their program with as many as we had."⁵ They decided to make some changes.

In 1987, CC/S appointed Mrs. Verhagan to their Parent Advisory Committee. The Verhagans traveled to Juneau and tried to work with the teaching staff, changing some requirements to meet the individualized needs of families with several children. They found the system rigid, and inflexible.

We got to the point where we had to go another route because we could not possibly keep up with the requirements. It was impossible for her [Merrily] to do everything that needed to be done with four children, five children, and ultimately we had nine children.⁶

³ Paul and Merrily Verhagan, interview. 10 April 1998

⁴ Ibid.

⁵ Ibid.

⁶ Ibid.

Paul Verhagan was appointed Magistrate for Tanana in 1983. In 1987, he was also appointed the Magistrate for Nenana, Healy and Cantwell. That gave the Verhagan family a choice of locations in which to live, and opportunities to work with other schools. However, the Verhagans encountered more rigid systems, as the schools were unwilling to work with home schoolers. Public school activities were off limits for the family. Mr. Verhagan summed up the school official's policy toward them:

You either put your children in the school and then they can participate in the things at the school, or you don't and you pay the consequences. If it is uncomfortable enough for you, then you will pull your kids out of that home school program and you will put them in the school where they belong.⁷

The Verhagans worked at developing relationships with school officials. Some years they partook in public school activities such as music and sports, however, it always depended on the demeanor of the current official in charge. The Verhagans were not against public schools, they simply loved home schooling their children and watching them grow. They felt the ideal schooling situation included interactions with the school. The Verhagans withdrew from CC/S when their sixth child arrived. Due to the high cost of independently educating six children, the only other option open to them was a district correspondence program.

The Verhagans live in Nenana, which is in the Yukon-Koyukuk School District. The district had a correspondence program, at the time, called Northwind School. The program was similar to CC/S, however, the staff was willing to sit down and figure out how to make the curricula work for them. The offices were located near Nenana and had a nice, accessible library. Northwind also provided a local advisory teacher who made home visits that Mrs. Verhagan enjoyed. She appreciated the help teaching her older students algebra. However, they ran into some of the same problems with Northwind as they found with CC/S. The correspondence programs held rigidly to a nine-month policy for coursework completion. The programs also did not count education days the same way the

Verhagans counted them. The Verhagans took vacations during the school year, or traveled down to Healy with Paul as he conducted his itinerant court work. The Verhagans counted education days throughout the year, not just for nine months. They also ran into problems following assigned coursework in science. All the science curricula originated in other places, such as Maryland, Nebraska, or even Juneau, where leaves and pond water are still accessible in November. The Verhagans became dissatisfied with the education system at large.

The longer we were at it, the more we began to realize that an awful lot of what is being done in our education system is being done for the convenience of the education system and was not being done with the best interests of the children in mind. When you take the whole system, it becomes a machine and once a machine heads in a particular direction, getting it to move off into another direction takes a tremendous amount of effort⁷

The Verhagans are a visionary couple. They continually tried to find a like-minded superintendent or principal who was willing to experiment with them in home education. They envisioned an education system that blended what society offered, in the form of education, and what parents wanted to offer. "The parents are in the best position to judge what is most effective, valuable and helpful for their children. The school should be there to help them and not fight them tooth-and-nail in everything they do because of funding."⁹ The Northwind correspondence program closed, which forced the Verhagan's to do something about their vision.

The closure of the Northwind School, in 1996, left 42 students without a local home education program. The Verhagans knew they could find a district that would want the funding from these 42 students. The parents organized, and approached the Nenana School District. They offered to enroll these children in Nenana's district, if the district

⁷ Ibid.

⁸ Ibid.

⁹ Ibid.

would let the parents be the teachers and decision makers. It would be a "school within a school that will meet their individual needs and at the same time help the [rural] school with their funding."¹⁰ Nenana did not feel it was a legal option and showed no interest in their offer. The Verhagans did not give up. They approached their old friends in Tanana and told the Tanana School superintendent, Ron Delay, that there was a vacuum in the district. Mr. Verhagan encouraged Superintendent Delay to take the opportunity to conduct an experiment with home education. Superintendent Delay thought it was a good idea, the increased funding would help the small village school. However, he was concerned about the large the number of students Mr. Verhagan offered. Superintendent Delay was retiring the following year and was apprehensive about jumping into this project and not being able to follow through on it, so he decided to try it on a small scale with just the Verhagans and another family. Superintendent Delay's Principal, Rod Pocock eventually saw the value behind the offer as the Verhagan family alone put the district in the black by \$35,000, where it would have been in the red by twice that much.¹¹

Merrily Verhagan remembers conducting an informal survey of the former Northwind School parents and other independent home school families. Most of these families said they wanted help with such things as; computers, software, buying their own choice of curriculum, and participation in the extracurricular events that were offered by the state correspondence program, CC/S. Principal Pocock expressed concern that if the home schooled students received these things, the regular school students would complain that the home schoolers got preferential treatment. Mr. Verhagan challenged Principal Pocock to split the same amount of money, that was used to fly the public school sports teams around the state, on the home school students and it would buy them each a computer. Administratively, it began to make sense. The students get the same amount of money, but different services.

The Verhagans successfully ran the program the fiscal year of 1996. They got all the problems worked out before Superintendent Delay retired. Since they could not be sure of the support of the incoming superintendent, they decided to take the program

¹⁰ Ibid.

¹¹ Ibid.

elsewhere. Fairbanks School District was their first stop, but the bureaucracy proved too cumbersome. Instead, they went to another small village district: Galena School District, where they met a like-minded, visionary superintendent: Superintendent Carl Knudsen.

Superintendent Knudsen was very interested in the proposal that the Verhagans were now calling Interior Distance Education (IDE). They often referred to the proposal as "a good idea" so Superintendent Knudsen suggested they add an "A" to it, making the acronym IDEA, meaning Interior Distance Education of Alaska.

Many conference hours went into IDEA. Superintendent Knudsen wanted to know the legal ramifications of this new venture and set his legal staff off to research the topic. In the mean time, he approached Galena's school board. The School Board asked him to define Mr. Verhagan's and Principal Pocock's role in the program. Mr. Verhagan had the experience and wanted to run the program, however, he did not have the administrative degrees. Principal Pocock had the degrees, but did not want to stay in Tanana, because he did not know the new superintendent. He also did not want to move to Galena, but to a larger population base like Fairbanks. The men proposed a base in Fairbanks, not Galena, and hoped to get at least 60 students to pay for the program. One hundred students was necessary to open a base in Fairbanks.

The men discussed the components that constitute a "perfect education system" and set off to recruit students. However, Superintendent Knudsen was adamant that no one put anything in writing. The Verhagans organized an open house at the Noel Wien Library in Fairbanks, Alaska.

The word traveled fast through the home school community. Lisa Sites, leader of Fairbanks' home school support group, Fairbanks Interior Home School Association, heard about IDEA and spent time on the phone with Paul Verhagan, asking all the questions she knew home schoolers would ask.¹²

The open house occurred on June 17, 1997. The Verhagans, with all their children, emceed the event. Superintendent Knudsen could not attend the meeting so he sent the president of Galena's school board, John Billings. Former principal, Rod Pocock, recently appointed director of the IDEA program, attended, as well as, Bart Mwarey, principal of

¹² Lisa Sites, interview. 17 November 1999

Galena's Project Education Charter School. After Mr. Verhagan introduced everyone, he divided the crowd into two groups; those interested in Galena's charter school and those interested in IDEA.¹³

Mr. Verhagan presented the IDEA philosophy very simplistically. "You are the teachers. We're here to help."¹⁴ He spoke from experience, explaining that public attitudes toward home schooling were not always positive. He recognized that those days were gone and the new laws give home schoolers more freedom to practice their craft. He did not feel that home schoolers should be cut off from the amenities of the public school. He believed that with help from the public school, home schoolers could do more.

Most home school parents know it costs quite a bit to purchase the curricula and pay for the materials that are needed to teach a child. And, after paying for the curricula and materials, few of us could then still afford to provide our students with a computer and Internet access and educational software. But these are all things that the schools have long been providing for school-based students and which our school will now provide to home school students as well.¹⁵

IDEA wanted a computer in each family's home. They believe that each child needs computer literacy in order to succeed in today's work force. The computers also provide direct access to the administration and staff of IDEA, as well as, other students. Paul suggested the use of the Internet in constructing a yearbook, accessing record keeping, locating scholarships, and pursuing information on career choices. In the future, IDEA intended to offer Internet classes.¹⁶

While extolling the benefits of IDEA, Paul quickly pointed out the parameters of the program and the responsibility of the parents. Parents would be expected to submit an Individual Learning Plan (ILP) to the IDEA staff, once they are hired, informing them of

¹³ Verhagan, Paul. IDEA Open House, Noel Wien Library unpublished notes. June 17, 1997

¹⁴ Ibid.

¹⁵ Ibid.

¹⁶ Ibid.

curricula choices and the goals for the year. For high school students, the staff works to individually design each ILP to meet the needs of each student, and meet the state's requirements for graduation. Finally, students must take the standardized testing required by the state.¹⁷ By the end of the open house night, they had 60 students enrolled in the program.¹⁸

The School Board President, John Billings, was relieved that there were enough students to run the program. However, Program Director Pocock needed a hundred students in order to open up the base in Fairbanks. Superintendent Knudsen hired the Verhagan's oldest daughter, Elisabeth, to help handle the phone calls. They published an 800 number and wrote out the answers for every conceivable question that parents might ask. Paul took the calls that became too difficult for his daughter. The phone rang incessantly.

Mr. Verhagan, Director Pocock, and Superintendent Knudsen were adamant about signing up only students that currently independently home schooled. They actively discouraged anyone from leaving a district public program. They feared that the Legislature, Governor's office, or Department of Education might kill the program before it started, if other Alaskan school districts felt Galena was robbing them of their students, i.e., funding for that district.

According to Rod Pocock, IDEA's philosophy is to; "give parents a wide choice of how they teach their children."¹⁹ IDEA's idea spread quickly throughout the home schooling community. The realization that parents could continue teaching their children the way they wanted to, and not directly pay for it; was a shock! On top of that, the promise of an IBM compatible computer, for a refundable deposit of \$200.00, paid by the family, proved too much of an enticement. Director Pocock got his 100 students and a lot more. Within three months, enrollment went from 60 to 1150! Galena put a cap on the enrollment because it became an administrative nightmare.²⁰

¹⁷ Ibid.

¹⁸ Paul and Merrily Verhagan, interview. 10 April 1998

¹⁹ Rod Pocock, interview. 16 March 1998

²⁰ Ibid.

During this time, Galena officials realized that they knew nothing about independent home schoolers. Normal correspondence programs simply provide the students with a curriculum of the program's choice. The officials were completely unaware of the booming, private, home school curriculum industry in the United States. Parents enrolled their children and sent in their requests for curriculum the staff had never heard of. This posed a dilemma, so they turned to Fairbanks' home school support group leader, Mrs. Lisa Sites.

Mrs. Sites was wary of the program. It all sounded too good to be true and she knew many home schoolers were wondering about the motives. She talked at length with Paul Verhagan, and later, Rod Pocock, as he assumed the director's seat. They confessed that Galena needed the money. Galena wanted to run a project-based, boarding charter school, and did not have the money to do it. IDEA was the profit maker needed to get it. The Sites decided to try the program and enrolled their children in IDEA before the Open House at the library. The Sites proved instrumental in gathering attendees for the meeting.²¹

Superintendent Knudsen says that Mrs. Sites was IDEA's first employee. Before IDEA could really set up in Fairbanks, they came to her for advice and guidance. She knew all about the varieties of curricula found in the private, home school industry. Mrs. Sites was able to explain to IDEA what the home schooling parents were asking for. She says that, "in the beginning I was doing just about everything, from setting up vendors [for purchase orders], to getting them to understand who home schoolers were, as opposed to correspondence."²²

IDEA's first conflict involved students crossing district lines and enrolling in the program. Home schoolers called IDEA from all over the state: Kenai, Barrow, Nome, Anchorage, etc., wanting to enroll their children in the program. Superintendent Knudsen was hesitant to serve them because they only had one office; it was in Fairbanks. IDEA could send the families computers, but could not really offer any other support. However, the parents were adamant that they wanted service in these areas far from Fairbanks and

²¹ Lisa Sites, interview. 17 November 1999

²² Ibid.

the interior of Alaska. Superintendent Knudsen studied the law and discovered there was no statement prohibiting them from crossing district lines. In fact, they found the example of the state-run, correspondence school that did cross district lines, Alyeska Central School, formally CC/S, (renamed in 1993). IDEA, technically considered a correspondence program, proceeded to enroll out-of-district students.²³

Superintendent Knudsen had the support of Alaska's Commissioner of Education, Dr. Shirley Holloway. Commissioner Holloway believed in educational choice and approved of new ways of delivering education. She saw the home schooling community's overwhelming response to the IDEA program and realized that it was filling a market need.²⁴

Commissioner Holloway, began receiving complaints that the Galena School District was stealing students and breaking the law. She received many phone calls, primarily from superintendents, who were accusing Galena School District of taking students away from them. Dr. Holloway remembers:

I was told that they [Galena] were crossing boundaries that they ought not to cross, they were breaking the law, that the program was bogus and how could they be using state money and giving parents a computer? It just went on and on and the phone was just hopping off the hook.²⁵

The superintendents wanted to know what the Department of Education was going to do about Galena.²⁶ Mrs. Sites remembers that the Department was under a lot of pressure from the other districts. She says that, "it wasn't the families; it was the superintendents. Their numbers were down—it was purely over funding."²⁷ IDEA found that after analyzing their numbers, only 12% of the students came from another district. The other 88% were independent home schoolers that received no services from any

²³ *Ibid.*

²⁴ Shirley Holloway, interview. 15 June 2000

²⁵ *Ibid.*

²⁶ *Ibid.*

²⁷ Lisa Sites, interview. 17 November 1999

district, or the state. Even if the district did not lose students, or funding, the superintendents still were upset because Superintendent Knudsen had the audacity to offer a program outside of his boundaries.²⁸ To deal with the state's superintendents, Commissioner Holloway contacted Superintendent Knudsen and told him that she was coming to Galena to talk.²⁹

Mrs. Sites went to that meeting in early September 1997, which included Commissioner Holloway, Deputy Commissioner Rick Cross, and the Governor's budget aides. They met in Galena's Charter School. It soon became apparent that Deputy Commissioner Cross did not trust the IDEA program and would not release the funding for it because the Department of Education was not convinced that these students really existed. Meanwhile, parents continued ordering curriculum and Galena paid for it from their other programs.³⁰

Commissioner Holloway decided to form a task force of people who operated correspondence programs within their respective school districts. She wanted these leaders to arrive at a consensus on the new regulatory language that recognized schools or programs, such as Galena's. Then these districts could operate within appropriate boundary regulations.³¹ Commissioner Holloway asked for four representatives from each program. Superintendent Knudsen, School Board President John Billings, Secretary/Teacher Mary Townsend, and field representative Lisa Sites attended. They met in Anchorage in November/December of 1997. The meeting addressed funding, curriculum standards, district boundaries, etc. They also prepared recommendations to present to the legislature. An interesting development concerned the Copper River School District, represented by Patrick Doyle. Copper River already ran a correspondence program that enrolled students that crossed district boundaries, on the Kenai Peninsula. According to Rita Lindow, home school mother in Kenai, Alaska, school districts in the Kenai Peninsula were very unfriendly to home schoolers. Many families asked their respective districts for help, as the Verhagans had asked theirs, and no district would give

²⁸ Shirley Holloway, interview. 15 June 2000

²⁹ *Ibid.*

³⁰ *Ibid.*

³¹ *Ibid.*

it. Copper River extended their hand to help these families, with a limited correspondence program that served students out of their district.³² No other school district had had an adverse reaction to Copper River's cross-district program.

Superintendent Knudsen began the meeting by asking Commissioner Holloway exactly who was complaining about Galena. She told him that she had been inundated with letters from students and families raving about the program. She found it interesting to receive so many positive communications when she also knew that Galena was having a hard time filling orders, and families were waiting a long time for service due to the high enrollment numbers.³³ The Commissioner informed him that it was the district superintendents doing all the complaining. Mrs. Sites reiterated that IDEA was not an orchestrated attempt to go out and steal kids from other districts. Galena City School District needed the funding and found a creative way to do it. However, they would rather people did not come from the rolls of another district before.³⁴

Lisa remembers that the other district members of the task force were united against Galena saying, "You're in it for the money! You're stealing kids and you're not really proving anything. You're probably not even spending much on those kids."³⁵ Lisa stepped in and pointed out that Galena was not stealing people who are making changes of their own choosing, "when people come by choice, that's not stealing."³⁶ Because of the anger level at the meeting, Dr. Holloway remembers that the task force meeting was not too successful on a policy level.³⁷

IDEA ran into other troubles with funding. Normally, school districts turn in their enrollment numbers in October and receive funding according to those numbers. IDEA turned in their numbers and received no funding. By November, they still did not receive funding. They were having trouble meeting payroll and paying curriculum vendors. Superintendent Knudsen asked his legal counsel what recourse Galena could take to receive funding. Mrs. Sites remembers that they told him that he could legally demand the

³² Rita Lindow, interview. 19 April 1998

³³ Shirley Holloway, interview. 15 June 2000

Author's knowledge of IDEA's write-in campaign to the Department of Education, Fall 1997

³⁴ Lisa Sites, interview. 17 November 1999

³⁵ Ibid.

³⁶ Ibid.

funding from the state because, "they have to have a reason not to fund. Right now, they do not have a good reason; you have answered all their questions. You have done everything right."³⁸

Lisa Sites remembers that Governor Tony Knowles heard about the funding tie-up. He called the Commissioner and the Deputy Commissioner to find out what was going on and asked if the program was real. Commissioner Holloway returned from the task force meeting determined to find out. She told Deputy Commissioner Rick Cross that unless this program was "bogus and there weren't really any students in this," that she personally supported what Superintendent Knudsen was doing.³⁹

If that many parents in the state felt they needed that kind of support, then he [Superintendent Knudsen] was doing what he ought to be doing and it was teaching us all a lesson about what was happening in education in the state. If they [the districts] were losing kids, maybe we ought to wake up and figure it out. Maybe we ought to be thinking of other ways of delivering instruction.⁴⁰

Deputy Commissioner Cross organized a telephone survey to call each IDEA family, making the phone calls on a weekend and well into the night. This alarmed many families, who wondered why a government agency would call on a weekend. The Department staff asked each family questions about the number of children enrolled in IDEA, if the family received their computer, and whether they had yet received any curriculum support.⁴¹ The survey results surprised the Department of Education. Only 14% of the families had not received their computers, or at least part of what they ordered. The Department also found an overwhelming majority of the families very happy with

³⁷ Shirley Holloway, interview. 15 June 2000

³⁸ Lisa Sites, interview. 17 November 1999

³⁹ Shirley Holloway, interview. 15 June 2000

⁴⁰ Ibid.

⁴¹ Author's experience from the telephone survey and discussion with Deputy Commissioner Cross

IDEA.⁴² These families were happy, despite the fact that some had not received their orders or computers, because they all were well aware of the hardships IDEA was experiencing. The fact that the families did not have to pay cash for anything, allowed them the grace to wait a little longer until the supplies arrived.⁴³

After the results of the survey were known, Deputy Commissioner Cross released the funding. In Alaska, rural communities receive a higher rate of funding, per student, than do students in urban areas. Deputy Commissioner Cross did not release the funding at the formula the rural community of Galena received, 1.348 ADM (Average Daily Membership), District Cost Factor. He funded IDEA at the same rate as Anchorage, 1.000 ADM, District Cost Factor.⁴⁴ Then he proceeded to cut *all* the rural correspondence programs to the lower rate. This was a substantial reduction in funding for the rural district correspondence programs and further served to anger the other district superintendents toward IDEA. This time the superintendents' anger focused on the choices of curriculum IDEA bought. They accused IDEA of buying religious materials. The districts complained to the Department of Education, who responded that there was no policy regarding the purchase of Christian curriculum. The Department asked the Attorney General for a ruling.

IDEA did order sectarian materials that first year. The staff was overwhelmed with the rapid changes within the program, and uneducated concerning the Christian content of some of the curriculum. The Attorney General issued a ruling that purchasing curriculum with Christian content was illegal, based on Article VII, Section 1 of the Alaska State Constitution that reads, "Schools and institutions so established shall be free from sectarian control. No money shall be paid from public funds for the direct benefit of any religious or other private educational institution."⁴⁵ IDEA sent out a memorandum, informing parents that they must discontinue purchasing the Christian curriculum.⁴⁶ The list included Christian publishers that offer pre-packaged Christian curriculum, such as;

⁴² Shirley Holloway, interview. 15 June 2000

⁴³ Author's experience

⁴⁴ Chapter 80, Section 14.17.460, 1998

⁴⁵ Alaska State Constitution, Article VII, Section 1. PUBLIC EDUCATION

Abeka, Bob Jones, School of Tomorrow, etc., as well as, home school curriculum and supply distributors that have Christian names, such as, Christian Book Distributor's and Sonlight Curriculum, but carry more than strictly Christian materials.

IDEA representatives conferred with the Attorney General's office and explained the differences between the vendors. They asked the Attorney General to be more specific. The Attorney General's opinion stated that purchasing curriculum from strictly Christian publishers gives benefit to a "religious educational institution" and is therefore illegal. The Christian publishers remained off IDEA's vendor list; however, most of the home school supply distributors, that sold more than strictly Christian materials, went back on. These vendors worked with IDEA, separately listing for them the materials that contained doctrinal information and those that did not. This dispelled concern about IDEA purchasing doctrinal materials with state money.

Many private home schoolers signed up with IDEA because they offered to buy the parent's choice of curriculum. Parental choice in educational materials was at the very heart of the program.⁴⁷ Parents were still allowed to teach their children as they pleased, however, IDEA could not buy the sectarian materials that the parents wanted. As some of these educational materials were removed from IDEA's vendor list, many parents became dissatisfied with this, and other facets of the program.⁴⁸

During the tumultuous beginning of the program, IDEA made many promises, however, these promises were not always put in writing. The policy for earning computers changed: IDEA rescinded the promise that families could earn their computers. The revocation of curriculum choices dismayed many families. People were required to send in the Individual Learning Plans (ILP). Many parents did not like giving up any control, stating that IDEA wanted too much personal information. There were no clear rules for what could be purchased with the allocated funds as the rules seemed to change at will. Proposed funding for music lessons and classes never transpired that first year. Finally, all

⁴⁶ "An open letter to the families of IDEA concerning curriculum purchases," memorandum from IDEA office dated January 9, 1998 referencing the Commissioner of Education's Memorandum 97-13

⁴⁷ Ibid.

⁴⁸ Author's experience

curriculum and materials became the property of Galena, and not the family, as originally stated.⁴⁹

Some promises dissipated due to the sheer workload on the staff. They simply could not do everything they promised that first year. Other promises disappeared as the State of Alaska imposed additional restrictions onto the program. Finally, internal changes came from the IDEA staff. For example, they realized that they had to keep records to provide accountability to the state. IDEA instituted various forms for parents to fill out to order materials, be reimbursed for monies spent, and later, to set aside part of their allotment for lessons, classes and special events. These forms morphed often enough to cause consternation for the parents.⁵⁰

IDEA required more accountability from the families by instituting Progress Reports and requiring grades, to measure student performance. Lisa Sites said that they had to come up with things for accountability because of the public funding they received, however, "we still remain pretty lenient and pretty open as far as letting parents teach what they want to teach and with the methods that they want to use."⁵¹

At the end of FY97, IDEA's funding formula decreased even further due to the passage of Senate Bill 36, "An Act relating to public schools; relating to the definition of a school district..."⁵² This bill changed the wording for the state funding for correspondence study. "Except as provided in AS 14.17.400(b), funding for the state centralized correspondence study program or a district correspondence program, *including a district that offers a statewide correspondence program*, includes an allocation from the public school account in an amount calculated by multiplying the ADM of correspondence program by 80 percent."⁵³ (Italics mine). IDEA lost 20 percent of its per student funding.

⁴⁹ Author's own experience, as well as, emails between Tammy Illguth (illguth@ptialaska.net) and Carol Simpson, field representative for IDEA (carols@galenaalaska.org) posted on the Alaska home school list (ah@beluga.com), later changed to (akhomeschoolers@onelist.com), on June 29, 1998

⁵⁰ Ibid.

⁵¹ Lisa Sites, interview. 17 November 1999

⁵² Chapter 83 SLA 98 Status date 6/11/98

⁵³ AS 14.17.430

The following year, 1998-99, the state allowed IDEA to removed the cap on enrollment.⁵⁴ Because so many families had been disillusioned by IDEA's broken promises, Mrs. Sites traveled around the state, holding meetings that explained exactly what IDEA was, and what it was not. The new families signed up knowing what to expect and what was required of them. "The sign up was just incredible with those meetings! By the time we closed, we ended up with over three thousand kids! We tripled in size, and it was a scramble trying to keep up with that. To keep going in the face of massive numbers of computers and orders!"⁵⁵ Total enrollment for 1998-99 was 3100 students.⁵⁶

During the first two years of IDEA's existence, school districts from other parts of the United States called to find out what they were doing and how they did it. They asked if IDEA could send a representative down to talk about it. The calls became so numerous that Program Director, Rod Pocock left IDEA and began traveling around the country, teaching districts how to set up a state-funded home school assistance program. Steve Musser took Mr. Pocock's place as Director of the program, and Lisa Sites filled the Assistant Director's seat. She currently heads the main office in Fairbanks.⁵⁷

IDEA now has five field offices: Fairbanks, Anchorage, Juneau, Kenai, and Wasilla. They pre-screen every potential family and require them to go through an orientation. Official enrollment for 1999-2000 is 3487 students.⁵⁸ There are over 900 students on IDEA's waiting list.⁵⁹ The number of new enrollees, jumping school districts lines, increased from 12% in 1997, to between 28-30% in the subsequent two years. Apparently, the increased numbers reflect the choice of families that Mrs. Sites qualified as "never home schooled before because they never had a support system and they just weren't quite ready to do it on their own."⁶⁰

⁵⁴ Rod Pocock, interview. 16 March 1998

⁵⁵ Lisa Sites, interview. 17 November 1999

⁵⁶ School Enrollment as of October 1, 1998. Office of Data Management, Department of Education, State of Alaska.

⁵⁷ Lisa Sites, interview. 17 November 1999

⁵⁸ School Enrollment as of October 1, 1999.

⁵⁹ Lisa Sites, per conversation. 11 April 2000

⁶⁰ Lisa Sites, interview. 17 November 1999

Three other Alaskan school districts have implemented programs similar to IDEA. The Kenai Peninsula Borough School District opened Kenai Connections in 1999. They currently enroll 227 students.⁶¹

Former Superintendent Roger Sampson, of the Chugach School District, began offering a cross-district, standards-based, correspondence program in 1996. They began servicing twelve students in the Anchorage area.⁶² Chugach differs from IDEA in that students are not enrolled in grade levels, instead they are tested to see where they rank on a developmental report card, which covers Kindergarten through 12th grade level achievements. Once the student is placed within the varying categories on the report card, the family is free to teach however they choose, with any curriculum choices they desire, as long as the student meets the goals and progresses on the report card. Chugach School District's home school program provides purely academic support and, like the other programs, they can only buy non-sectarian curriculum materials. Money allotted for extra-curricular activities, such as music, art, physical education lessons, must meet the district's criteria for cultural awareness. Students must prove to the district that they excel in the extra-curricular activity, to show that it is an integral part of their life. Students are required to come to district offices regularly, and be assessed by an advisory teacher.⁶³

Chugach School District is adamant that they will only serve a handful of students as they are a very small school district servicing the Prince William Sound area. Valdez student enrollments, between 1996 and 2000, are limited to thirty. The Anchorage population fluctuates between 24 to 30 students.⁶⁴ They served a total of 89 students in FY99 and 88 students in FY2000.⁶⁵ Chugach is currently reaching out to the Fairbanks population for FY2001.

Nenana School District eventually worked with Paul Verhagan, which resulted in the opening of CyberLynx Correspondence in the fall of 1998. CyberLynx offers the same format as IDEA, but strives to be more accommodating for parents and students.

⁶¹ Per phone conversation with Connections representative. 10 March 2000

⁶² Betty Crain, per phone conversation 2 June 2000

⁶³ Notes from Chugach School District's information and enrollment meeting at Alaskaland Civic Center, Betty Crain and Annie Dougherty were the main speakers. Fairbanks, Alaska 24 May, 2000

⁶⁴ Betty Crain, Per phone conversation 2 June 2000

According to CyberLynx representative Tammy Illguth:

CyberLynx program was initiated by the same people who initiated the IDEA program and is not intended to compete with IDEA, or any other program. It is instead designed to assure that all home schoolers, who want to participate in a home schooling program, will be able to do so, as well as, ensure that as wide a variety of services as possible are available to home school families. The more new services that are developed with the input of home schoolers, the better served all home school families will be, no matter which program they participate in, because there is nothing that prevents good ideas from being utilized by any program that wishes to use them.⁶⁶

However, CyberLynx does compete with IDEA. Families, who became disillusioned with IDEA, withdrew and enrolled in the CyberLynx program. Some families only withdrew one of their children from IDEA, and enrolled them in CyberLynx, so as to get another computer in the household.⁶⁷ CyberLynx enrolled 223 students in 1998-99,⁶⁸ 870 students in 1999-2000.⁶⁹

IDEA paved the way for the other state-funded home school assistance, district programs. Lisa Sites declares that; "we're the golden child because every time they [the State Department of Education] ever asked us for anything, we didn't just give them what they needed, we gave them more."⁷⁰

Now that IDEA is established and no longer fighting to stay afloat, their enrollment numbers give them power. Universities want to collaborate with them by

⁶⁵ Ibid.

⁶⁶ E-mail from Tammy Illguth to Alaska Homeschool Network (ah@bcluga.com) 4 August 1998

⁶⁷ Author's knowledge of two families that have done this.

⁶⁸ School Enrollment as of October 1, 1998. Office of Data Management, Department of Education, State of Alaska.

⁶⁹ School Enrollment as of October 1, 1999.

⁷⁰ Lisa Sites, interview. 17 November 1999

giving students dual credit for high school and college. The vendors go out of their way to make more materials available. Alaska School Activities Association (ASAA), historically closed to home schoolers, is now allowing home school participation. Students can take private music lessons, or classes, and whole families gain memberships in local athletic clubs in the name of physical education. IDEA can afford to bring quality workshops to the home schoolers. According to Rod Pocock, "No other correspondence program in the state does this. We are the only one."⁷¹

Rod is correct. At this time, there is no other program in Alaska that offers so much for a student educated in the home. IDEA has opened doors most home schoolers never dreamed possible.

⁷¹ Rod Pocock, interview. 16 March 1998

"The voice of one crying in the wilderness..."⁷²

IDEA opened many doors of opportunity to the average home schooler, however, it also opened the door to a veritable Pandora's box within the home schooling community. According to Dr. Brian Ray, President of the National Home Education Research Institute (NHERI):

As home schooling has grown to a now-estimated 1.2 to 1.7 million students, many new government-controlled and tax-funded programs have sprung up around the country that enroll home-school students. With these state-run programs in place, the lines between "public" and "private" appear to become blurred.⁷³

Dr. Ray poses the question, "Do such programs serve the best interests of home education, or do they hamper its free operation and unique benefits?"⁷⁴

Alaska Private and Home Educators Association (APHEA), as well as many independent home schoolers, believe the latter. State correspondence, and more recently, district correspondence programs were always a choice for the potential home schooler. Those that wanted structure and support selected one of the two public correspondence options. They were considered public correspondence students, educated at home, while the rest of the students educated at home were considered private home schoolers. The advent of IDEA, CyberLynx and other tax-funded home school assistance programs, that allowed the formerly private home schoolers to continue on in much the same way as they always had, blurred the lines between the public school students, educated at home, and the private home schooler.

⁷² The Bible, Isaiah 40:3

⁷³ Ray, Brian D. Ph.D. "Research News," *The Teaching Home Magazine* Vol.XVII No.6, p25

⁷⁴ Ibid.

In FY97-98, IDEA's typical family had home schooled their children for at least three years without being a part of any district or state program.⁷⁵ Eighty-eight percent of IDEA's families that joined the first year were, by this definition, private home schoolers. Although many families realized they signed onto a public home education option, it was so unlike the more institutionalized correspondence options, that they did not realize that by state law definition, they were no longer considered home schoolers. IDEA families were now considered public correspondence students and no longer had the benefit or protection of SB134 that completely deregulated home schooling and gave the parents the right to home school with absolutely no restrictions or requirements to fulfill and no attendance requirements, testing, or registration with the state.⁷⁶ These families could no longer gain membership in Home School Legal Defense Association (HSLDA) because the organization does not represent public school students. IDEA students are public school students educated at home.

This was fine for many, but most of the veteran, independent home schoolers did not put any thought into what the long term effects might be as a result of giving up their freedoms and rights as home schoolers. One of the important points that Jack Phelps and APHEA lobbied for, and appeared in "The Resolution" passed by the 19th Legislature⁷⁷ was that the, "cost of educating children at home is borne by the parents, thus saving money from the state general fund."⁷⁸ The independent home schoolers that joined IDEA's ranks actually increased the cost of education for the State of Alaska. Galena's funding level, from the state, increased from \$1,426,647 in FY96 (before IDEA), to \$14,261,308 in FY99.⁷⁹ That constituted nearly a 13 million dollar increase in funding for education in the State of Alaska from the IDEA program alone.

A few voices are speaking out, alerting people of the possible repercussions this might have on home schooling throughout the State of Alaska. The points against these public programs are substantial.

⁷⁵ Rod Pocock, interview. 16 March 1998

⁷⁶ Lockner, Terina, *What's the Big I.D.E.A.?* APHEA Newsletter v.7.no.4, November 1997 p10

⁷⁷ SCR 25, 19th Legislature 2nd Session 1996

⁷⁸ Ibid.

⁷⁹ *Foundation Program FY88 through FY99 State Aid Entitlements*, Department of Education, Juneau, Alaska

One argument points out that the school districts use the home-schooled children to increase the amount of dollars they get from the state. Part of this money finances the public home education program; the rest finances the expenses of traditional public school education.

Many families home school their children because they do not believe in, or agree with, the public school system. Some believe that the public schools are immoral and Godless institutions, while other non-believers consider the public schools too religious.⁸⁰ Others consider the schools anti-progressive, or not child-centered enough. Whatever the angle, helping fund these institutions may be against their moral, faith, or pedagogical values. By taking state money for their own home schooling, they are actually supporting the public school system with which they disagree.

Others disagree solely on the grounds of personal responsibility. These parents believe that the education of children is the complete responsibility of the parents. They claim that these public programs create greater dependency, instead of accepting personal responsibility. When families accept state funds for home education, they are mandating "civil government to be disobedient to God by requiring it to assume responsibilities which God never gave to civil government."⁸¹

Home school advocates, who have fought to gain the freedoms Alaskans enjoy, argue that by embracing tax-funded home education, home schoolers weaken their position for future battles. Alaskans are breaking new ground for home schoolers all over the country. It may be hard to defend the legitimacy of independent home schools when so many are willing to abandon the least restrictive home school law in the country, in favor of public subsidy and government control.⁸²

People who oppose governmental control believe that parents are abdicating their responsibility of educating their children by allowing the state to pay for it. Some say that it is the same as taking welfare.⁸³ They warn that the state legislature will eventually demand

⁸⁰ Bolick, C. *The Home Schooling Movement*, (1987) as quoted in Dr. Brian Ray's, *Marching to the Beat of Their Own Drum! Home School Legal Defense Association* (1992)

⁸¹ Hanson, Roy M. Jr., *Summary Analysis of Scholarships (Vouchers) for Private Education* September 1, 1992

⁸² Lockner, Terina, *What's the Big I.D.E.A.? APHEA Newsletter* v.7.no.4, November 1997 p10

⁸³ Van Diest, Marty, *On State Funded Homeschooling APHEA Newsletter* v.7 no. 1, August 1997 p9

something in return for the money they are pouring into these special programs. That usually means some sort of governmental control over the home schoolers' lives.

Some claim that public schools, who are not meeting national academic guidelines, are using the standardized test scores of the home schooled children to help the whole school district look good, because home schoolers traditionally test higher than mainstream public school students.⁸⁴

Finally, the private home schoolers, who joined these public programs, drove up the cost of education in the State of Alaska. Many have said that they were finally getting something for all the tax money they paid into the system. These families coveted the things now available with public funding, allowing the state to be a provider for the family, instead of letting the head of the household provide. This is an educational welfare system, and it created a new, expensive, bureaucracy to administrate it.⁸⁵ Under a welfare system, everyone pays for it under the compulsory tax burden.

It has been hard for the private, independent home schoolers to resist a computer and curriculum paid by their hard-won tax dollars. Home schoolers pay the same allotment of education taxes, with their property taxes, as does everyone else and have grumbled for years about not getting anything for their money. Families have to weigh the costs and benefits. Many families see the IDEA program as an answer to prayer and a method of relieving the heavy financial burden. Others see it as an impending infringement upon their personal liberties. No matter which side one chooses, Alaska home schoolers are first to realize that IDEA, and other such programs, are "making history and changing the definition of public [home] education forever."⁸⁶

⁸⁴ Lockner, Terina, *What's the Big I.D.E.A.?* p10

⁸⁵ Hanson, Roy M. Jr., *Summary Analysis of Scholarships (Vouchers) for Private Education* September 1, 1992

⁸⁶ Lockner, Terina, *What's the Big I.D.E.A.?* p10

Chapter Six

The Friendly Home School State:

The Educational Experiments What the Alaskan Experience Shows

Alaskans have had unprecedented freedom to conduct experiments in an attempt to educate the children that are spread across one of the most geographically diverse lands on earth. Alaska is a place where an enterprising individual can still make a difference.

A survey, conducted by the author in 1996 (before IDEA began), tallied 3408 home-educated students. This number did not include the home schoolers who were under a private school umbrella, students who enrolled with programs out-of-state, or those who home schooled "underground." It is safe to assume there were thousands more, as demonstrated by the number of home schoolers who signed up for the IDEA program, that had never been in any public program before.

In the year 1999-2000, there are 8520 public school students, educated at home, on the Department of Education's School Enrollment Records.¹⁰³ There are at least hundreds, maybe even thousands that cannot be counted because they are either accountable to an out-of-state program, or to no one. Home School Legal Defense Association currently has 119 Alaskan families enrolled.¹⁰⁴ That does not give the number of children home-schooled, but according to Dr. Brian Ray, the average home schooling family has at least three children.¹⁰⁵ This brings Alaska's total up to between 9000 to 9500 children educated in the home. There are many more private home schoolers who are not members of HSLDA because they do not feel their liberties are sufficiently threatened.¹⁰⁶ The 9000 to 9500 children receiving education at home is 6.7 to 7 percent of all Alaskan school-aged children.

¹⁰³ School Enrollment as of October 1, 1999, State of Alaska, Department of Education, Office of Data Management

¹⁰⁴ Home School Legal Defense Association, 12 April 2000

¹⁰⁵ Ray, Brian D. Ph.D., *Home Schooling on the Threshold*, NHERI Publications 1999 p6

¹⁰⁶ Author's knowledge of many Alaskan home schooled families

As of the year 2000, Alaskan home schoolers have more freedom to practice their craft than any other state or territory of the United States. Alaska has five different options available for legal home education. Only California and Tennessee offering of four options each, approaches Alaska's freedom. According to the Home School Legal Defense Association's survey of home school laws, Alaska's home schoolers can choose from the following five options:¹⁰⁷

1. Use a Private Tutor: Families bear costs
 - Attendance required—180 days a year
 - Subjects required—Comparable to those offered in the public school
 - Teacher qualification—Teacher certification
 - Notice required—None
 - Bookkeeping required—None
 - Testing required—None
2. Enroll in a State Department of Education approved Full-time Correspondence Program:
 - Attendance required—180 days a year
 - Subjects required—Comparable to those offered in the public school
 - Teacher qualification—None
 - Notice required—None
 - Bookkeeping required—None
 - Testing required—None
3. Request [District or Local] School Board Approval to Provide an Equal Alternate: Educational Experience:
 - Attendance required—180 days a year
 - Subjects required—Comparable to those offered in the public school
 - Teacher qualification—None
 - Notice required—None
 - Bookkeeping required—None
 - Testing required—None
4. Qualify as a Religious or Other Private School:
 - Attendance required—180 days a year
 - Subjects required—None, but standardized testing must cover English grammar, reading, spelling, and math
 - Teacher qualification—None
 - Notice required—File a "Private School Enrollment Reporting Form"

¹⁰⁷ Home School Legal Defense Association's web page (www.hslda.org) Across the States: Show Me the Laws

with the local superintendent by the first day of public school; also file a "Private and Denominational Schools Enrollment Report" and a "School Calendar" with the state department of education by October 15 each year.

Bookkeeping required—Maintain monthly attendance records; also maintain records on immunizations, courses, standardized testing, academic achievement, and physical exams.

Testing required—Administer a standardized test in grades 4, 6, and 8

5. Establish and Operate a Home School: Option became available with the 1997 deregulation.

Attendance required—None
 Subjects required—None
 Teacher qualification—None
 Notice required—None
 Bookkeeping required—None
 Testing required—None

Practically speaking, parents that want to educate their children, at home, can choose to be completely accountable to a state correspondence program, (Alyeska Central School, formerly CC/S), complete with grading and advisory teachers; or to a district correspondence program, also complete with grading, advisory, and perhaps even itinerant teachers. District programs are known for working more with the parents than the state correspondence program is.

Parents can also choose complete to medium accountability to a university, college or school that offers pre-packaged, or cyber, home school education options, such as: Bob Jones University, Abeka, Calvert School, Laurel Springs, Delta Cyber School, University of Nebraska, etc.

Parents wanting more accountability can also hire a private tutor. Such a program is available through the Family Partnership Charter School within the Anchorage School District. The school is comprised of home schoolers. The school keeps a talent bank of certified teachers, some are retired, some work in the evenings; that teach the children subjects that the family feels they cannot. The tutoring expenses are paid out of the child's allotment.

Parents wanting less interference can choose medium accountability in a private exempt home school (which actually ended in 1997, but remains on the books as a legal home

schooling option),¹⁰⁸ or a district correspondence home school assistance program such as, IDEA or CyberLynx.

Parents who want no one to bother them can choose to be accountable to no one, and home school completely on their own.

Whatever their choice, Alaskan parents, who educate their children at home, have much for which to be thankful. They do not have to deal with some of the horrors encountered by home schoolers in other parts of the United States, where home schooling is less accepted and more regulated. A few recent examples include; Paul and Debbie Nabholz, Edgemont, South Dakota, who were arrested, photographed, fingerprinted, booked and then released for not providing copies of their children's birth certificates to the school district. Under South Dakota law, home schools are private schools, and are therefore required to keep copies of birth certificates for their students. The Nabholz's "believe they are in compliance with the law because they operate the child's school," and have copies of the birth certificates in their home.¹⁰⁹ In Levittown, New York, school district officials "reported names of many home schoolers—including many who had complied fully with the burdensome paperwork requirements of New York law—to Nassau County Department of Social Services. In turn, the department mailed letters to the home-schooling families, advising them that they were being investigated for child abuse."¹¹⁰

Alaskan home educators have often dealt with a not-so-friendly Department of Education, but never a hostile legislature. Alaskan home schoolers, unlike their counterparts in other states of the United States, never suffered any crisis that resulted in litigation. Rather, change came as a process during a long period of time educating the political leaders, who legislated the changes.

In a land where an individual can still make a difference, several hearty individuals, such as: Margaret Justice, Jack Phelps, Paul Verhagen, and Carl Knudsen, took the risks and helped implement the experiments in home education that resulted in a palette of choices for Alaskan home educators.

¹⁰⁸ Darren Jones. Home School Legal Defense Association, Interview. 12 April 2000

¹⁰⁹ Michael Farris, "Government Intervenes too Often in Family Life," In *The News*, *The Washington Times*, Sept. 29, 1999

¹¹⁰ *Ibid.*

Home education began in Alaska before the public schools reached every community. It became an institution due to the vast distances in the state, and high costs of building and maintaining public schools where the population did not warrant it. The fact that home schooling survives in its multi-faceted forms, even after public schools reached every community, speaks of the pioneer spirit and rugged individualism common to home schoolers. Home schooling is part-and-parcel with Alaskan lifestyles.

To sum it up, Dr. Brian Ray spoke at the 1997 APHEA Convention, and made an analogy with computer technology. He said that, "home schooling is our default setting."¹¹¹ This is especially true in Alaska.

¹¹¹ Bob Parsons, "Homeschooling is our Default Setting" APHEA Newsletter, v.7 no.3 October 1997 p8

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